

**4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter – Cycle A**  
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**May 3, 2020**

- I. **If your parents or grandparents lived through the 1970's, then they will have heard about one of the popular activities that one could find going on at workshops and seminars around the country. Participants would be asked to describe themselves with the use of images to the other members of the group. The belief was that through the use of images, you would get to know yourself better, and the people in your group would get to know you better.**
  - A. **One such workshop that I attended at the University of Arkansas some years ago was for administrators of financial funds at colleges and universities.**
    1. **During the workshop, we spent the morning hours learning about administering scholarships and grants.**
    2. **The afternoon hours were spent in sensitivity sessions and group dynamics.**
  - B. **One of the activities during the sensitivity sessions was that we were asked to describe ourselves to the others in the group in images of a bird or an animal.**
    1. **For example, one person would say about himself or herself, "I am like an eagle who loves to soar freely and I don't like to have people or things control me."**
    2. **Another person might say, "I am like a meadowlark that loves to rise early in the morning and begin my day by singing and cheering up other people."**
    3. **Someone else might say, "I am like a German Shepherd dog who is a very loyal friend, and I would do anything to protect my friends from harm or danger."**
  - C. **Then we were asked to use a tree as an image to describe ourselves.**
    1. **One person might say that he is like a weeping willow because he loves to protect and give shelter to others.**
    2. **Another person might say that she is like an orange tree because she is always giving in so many different ways. The orange blossoms have pollen for producing honey, the tree produces oranges for eating, and the tree provides shelter from the summer's heat.**
- II. **Something similar goes on in the Gospels. Jesus uses various images to tell us who He is and what the Kingdom of God is.**

- A. One time He says, “I am the vine and you are the branches.” The immediate image that should come to mind is that all His followers are closely connected to Him. The vine gives life to the branches. Once the branches are cut off from the vine, the branches are no longer able to produce fruit, and they die.**
- B. Another time, Jesus says that He is the Groom and that His followers (the Church) are the Bride. The immediate image that we get from that is Jesus wants to have a deep and intimate relationship with each and every one of us. You can’t have a bride without a groom. In the case of Jesus the Groom, He has laid down His life for His Bride. He is a faithful Groom who continues to love His Bride even if the bride is unfaithful to Him.**
- C. In another place in Scripture, Jesus says, “I am the Light of the world.” In the midst of darkness in the world, and that darkness is sin and evil, there is hope. Our Easter candle is a reminder to us that Jesus is the Light of the world who overcomes and defeats sin and evil. No matter how dark things might get in one’s life, Jesus as the Light of the World will continue to shine upon us offering us hope and healing. The darkness of sin and evil can never win victory over the Light of the world.**
- D. In today’s Gospel, Jesus says, “I am the Good Shepherd.” Then He goes on to say who and what a Good Shepherd is.**
- 1. A Good Shepherd lays down His life for His sheep. Who are the sheep? His followers.**
  - 2. The sheep are the people He will protect from enemies, He will guard from predators who could harm them, and then He is willing to die for them.**
  - 3. Then He says, “I am the gate for the sheep.” As the gate, He is the entrance into safe pastures, into a safe place, into heaven.**
- E. We then hear Jesus use the image of a hired man who has a different relationship to the sheep. The hired man works for pay, whereas the shepherd has a commitment and loyalty to the sheep.**
- 1. Even in the midst of danger, the Good Shepherd will risk his life to protect the sheep.**
  - 2. The Good Shepherd will not lead his sheep to pastures where there are poisonous grasses. He protects them from dangerous cliffs. He leads them to still waters because sheep can’t drink from streams of fast-running water. The Good Shepherd will recognize the wolf that comes in sheep’s clothing, those who would want to harm the sheep.**

- F. The Good Shepherd is willing to let himself be seen as neglecting the 99 sheep so that He can seek out the one sheep who is lost and needs help getting back into the fold.**
- 1. Maybe that one sheep got lost from the flock and can't find its way back to the flock.**
  - 2. Or, maybe the one sheep was made to feel unwelcome in the flock, and so drifted off. Maybe we have isolated them and not reached out to them.**
  - 3. Another possibility is that one of the sheep has isolated itself from us.**
  - 4. In either case, the Good Shepherd works at bringing the lost sheep back into the fold.**

**III. Another image that Jesus uses to describe Himself is, "I am the Bread of Life." When His followers heard these words from Jesus, they were reminded of how Moses fed the Israelites in the desert with manna, which they called "bread from heaven."**

- A. Jesus now becomes the bread from heaven to feed His followers. To make that image more real to us, at the Last Supper, He took a loaf of bread, blessed it, broke it, gave it to His apostles that were seated at the table with Him, and said, "Take this, all of you, and eat of it, for this is my Body, which will be given up for you."**
- B. When His disciples eat His Body, they receive His eternal life. Eating His Body is to satisfy the spiritual hunger of His disciples. The spiritual hunger may be to know God better, to have a more intimate relationship with Him, to know His word better, to fulfill the need to belong to a community of believers.**
- C. When supper was ended, Jesus took the cup. Again, He gave thanks and praise, gave the cup to His disciples, and said: "Take this, all of you, and drink from it, for this is the chalice of my Blood, the blood of the new and eternal covenant, which will be poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this in memory of me."**
- D. When we drink the Blood of Christ, we drink it to everlasting life. Drinking His Blood is to quench the spiritual thirst of His disciples. The spiritual thirst may be to fulfill the desire to know that God exists, that God loves each and every one of us, that God will be merciful and compassionate towards us as we repent of our sins, that God will be faithful to us even when we fail to be faithful to Him.**
- E. Much grace comes to us as we receive Communion. In order to receive Communion in the Catholic Church, one would first of all need to be a Catholic in good standing with the Church, to be free**

**from mortal sin, and to know that Jesus is truly Present under the form of Bread and Wine: Body, Soul, Blood and Divinity.**

- F. At Mass after the Lamb of God, the celebrant bows to offer a silent prayer: “May the receiving of your Body and Blood, Lord Jesus Christ, not bring me to judgment and condemnation, but through your loving mercy be for me protection in mind and body and a healing remedy.” The Good Shepherd offers healing at the reception of Communion.**
- G. At the elevation of Body and Blood before Communion we pray together: “Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.” Every time we pray for healing, the Lord heals and sometimes He cures.**
- H. Let be open to whatever healing the Lord may want for us every time we receive Communion whether under the form of Bread and Wine, or through a Spiritual Communion.**