

Homily041616

## JESUS WAS A REAL SHEPHERD: GOOD AND RELIABLE

We are just back from our most recent pilgrimage to the Holy Land. On the day we got to Jerusalem we had an audience with the Latin Rite Patriarch of Jerusalem, Archbishop Fouad Twal. You may remember that the Patriarch visited us here at Saint Anthony's during the World Meeting of Families when the Holy Father came to town back in September. We were hosting about 30 Jordanian Catholics all of whom were in his Archdiocese. He knew some of them and accepted their invitation to come to Saint Anthony's and visit with them. He celebrated Mass, preached the homily and did a Question and Answer session for about 45 minutes afterwards. He then went down to Friendship Hall for some food and light conversation and then was off back to his hotel room to prepare to meet Pope Francis.

When we met with him in Jerusalem he gave each of us a rosary blessed by the Holy Father when he had come to Jerusalem a few years back. The Patriarch also spoke of what was happening in his part of the world. He spoke of how the Church was asked to shoulder the cross that has been placed upon us as Christ accepted the cross placed upon him. He asked us to be people of hope in a world that has lost its way. He asked us to give our own witness to the truth of Easter and its source of joy even when things are difficult. He has very little power and not many resources but his faith is strong and his conviction unwavering. He truly cares about his people and all people no matter their faith. People count because they are people.

I was reminded of the Patriarch as I watched Pope Francis load 12 Muslims onto his own plane to bring them back to Rome from the Greek Island of Lesbos where they had fled from the fighting in Syria. They will be cared for at the Vatican. The Pope won't be doing it himself but the community of Saint Egidio has stepped up and volunteered to find places for these people to live. It may seem like it is simply a drop in the bucket considering the hundreds of thousands of refugees trying to flee these war ravaged lands. But it is at least a start and it shows others the way and it sets the bar at the place where others can step up. He is a good shepherd not just to his own flock but to others too. So is Patriarch Twal a good shepherd.

Sometimes we think that being good shepherds is the work of those who have been ordained. I don't think so. Yes it is part of our life's task but shepherds can be anybody. Shepherds are male and female. Shepherding is work, hard work. Often it is thankless work because it is the same day in and day out. Herding sheep is not that much fun, not that easy. Besides being boring a lot of the time, it can suddenly become very dangerous when a wolf or other animal of prey appears on the scene to have one of the lambs for dinner. If you really are a good shepherd then you are going to do whatever you can to defend the sheep and to protect the sheep.

I have found that most of life's shepherding comes at times when we least expect it or are just going about our daily responsibilities. An example. I was over at Silverstream Nursing Home on Thursday saying Mass for the residents, a small group of about 12. In the middle of the Mass the Head Nurse appears at the door and asks me if I can come immediately to a

resident who is actively dying. I told her that I am not allowed to interrupt Mass like that but as soon as I was finished I would come. I prayed to Our Lord to get me there in time. After I finished Mass I went, still in my vestments down the corridor and into the patient's room. At the bedside were her daughter, her son and his wife. The mother was comatose. They did not know if she was Catholic but when it comes to the moment of death all denominational distinctions disappear. You anoint the person and seek forgiveness for their sins and you commend them into the arms of our loving God. All of which I did. I had her children pray with me and then I left. I had two other rooms to visit with communion and another anointing. Ten minutes later I was going back to the room where we had Mass to pack up and the Head Nurse told me that the first lady had died. That fast. Somehow she was waiting for permission. My presence provided that. That is my job, my vocation, my ministry but it is my shepherding too.

I was speaking with a friend of mine who was speaking about a very serendipitous experience his youngest daughter had that landed her a new job and a substantial salary increase. He said to me, "I don't know how she does it. She's not much of a Church-goer but she always seems as if she is protected. I looked at him and said," You storm heaven for her every day. Your prayers are the protective bubble in which she lives until her own faith kicks in. And you wonder how she is protected? Your prayer provides the protection." He is a good shepherd. I would wager that never in his life did he ever think of his care for, love for, praying for his kids as being their good shepherd but to me it is abundantly clear. I see it all the time. It just doesn't get the press coverage.

There is an awful lot of goodness that goes unattended to. But there is an awful lot of care, of prayer, of love. Jesus' sheep do hear his voice. And the ones we shepherd we hear their voices too amid the constant din of the manifold voices that bombard us all day, every day. But none of this is really new. It may be new to us but not new in itself. People even say that about this particular political season. That they have never experienced anything like it. I don't believe I have either. But I do believe our earth has seen the likes of this before and many times before. It's just new to us. Our stance? What is our stance to be vis-à-vis all of this?

We are to be good shepherds. We must shepherd our values, our convictions, our virtues. We must shepherd our relationships, our spouses, our parents and elders, our children and grandchildren, our neighbors. Our decisions must flow from our shepherding. What is best for everyone not just myself. We must pray that the Lord will enlighten us. "Lord what do you want me to do in this situation? Or in this upcoming election? We can ask that. We can pray about that. We do not have to allow ourselves to get all torqued out of shape. We can trust and pray and then cast our vote. WE can do the little things that no one else notices but are a fundamental part of shepherding. We can seek humility. We can take on the boredom and the routine. We can re-devote ourselves to those around us. We can reach out in forgiveness when others are calling for judgment. And in doing all of this, we will lead. And our country needs those who believe in Jesus Christ, to take the lead in what is happening. Our country needs our shepherding.