

April 22, 2018

From Fr. Jim . . .

The Fourth Sunday of Easter is unofficially known as Good Shepherd Sunday because in all three cycles of readings the Good Shepherd is mentioned. My dog, Clancy is a Border Collie mix. Border Collies come from Ireland and are working dogs that have been trained to herd sheep. Although Clancy is certainly domesticated and I have no idea if he has learned to herd sheep, occasionally he shows me what I believe is a herding instinct. At these times, he reminds me of the Good Shepherd.



I think Clancy's herding instincts come out when I run the vacuum sweeper. As soon as I turn it on, no matter where he is, even if he is sleeping, he runs. At first, I think he is afraid and that he is running away from something that may hurt him. But he never runs away or too far. He will run past me and then circles back and watches me attentively with his head turned slightly and his ears straight up at attention. When I change direction and come toward him, again he moves quickly past me and circles back once more to take a watchful and alert position.

It seems that he is on guard to protect me from something that may want to hurt me! When I'm finished vacuuming, I make a point to pet him, affirm him and thank him for his protection and concern for me from something that appears to him to be a dangerous undertaking. That's my boy!

In the Good Shepherd Gospels, we are told that a shepherd knows his sheep's voice and the sheep know his shepherd's voice. The sheep hear the shepherd's voice and they follow the shepherd. (This is true with Clancy and me, some of the time!) The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep and will guard the sheep from being snatched up by the wolf (or the vacuum sweeper). If the sheep are good or bad or lost or among the fold or of another fold, the Good Shepherd remains faithful to being good and offering protection and keeping guard and giving his life to all the sheep, no matter what.

The Good Shepherd image is a great one to describe the Resurrected Christ. In the Resurrected Christ we can easily see how the Lord lays down his life for all the sheep in order to take it up again. We clearly see how the lost are found and how the Good Shepherd is the gate that all the sheep pass through for eternal life. In this way, the Shepherd knows each and every one of us and each and every one of us knows the Risen Christ as our Good Shepherd. In this way, the Lord protects, guards, and saves all the sheep from the effects of sin and death. In this way, the Lord came that everyone may have life abundantly. Alleluia, Jesus Christ has risen indeed and his care for us never ends. Move and herd us together, O Good Shepherd, into life with God and each other with the very life that moved you to lay down your life so that others may live. Give us life with you that never ends and hold onto us tightly until you bring us safely home. "The Lord is our Shepherd, there is nothing more that we shall ever want." "Shepherd us, O Lord beyond our wants and fears, from death into life."