

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER (Year A)
4-26-2026 Homily.

I. Introduction

Shepherds in different parts of the world face unique problems and challenges, based on the climate and the terrain, and over the centuries they've developed their own techniques and solutions. For instance, in the Scottish Highlands, unwary sheep might wander among the rocks and get themselves into places they're unable to get out of. Sometimes very beautiful and tasty green grass is to be found on a small mountain ledge, and a sheep might jump down ten or twelve feet to graze on it—but then find itself trapped and unable to climb back out. Before long the shepherd will hear the sheep's terrified bleating—but the custom in Scotland is to do nothing about it for several days. Someone asked a shepherd why this was, and the man—speaking from years of experience—explained, “A sheep is so foolish and impetuous that, if I tried to rescue it too soon, it might jump off the precipice and kill itself out of sheer excitement. No, I wait until it's too weak to move; only then do I go down, pick it up gently and carefully, and rescue it” (Msgr. Arthus Tonne, *Stories for Sermons*, Vol. 15, #248).

Sometimes we human beings put ourselves in dangerous situations by straying from God. When this happens, He doesn't abandon us or punish us, but He does allow us to experience our weakness and our utter dependence on Him—for in this way the suffering we ourselves may have caused can be to our lasting benefit.

II. Development

Today is unofficially known as “Good Shepherd Sunday,” for in the Gospel each year on this Fourth Sunday of Easter, Jesus uses this image to describe His relationship with His followers. He is the One Who truly cares for us in all our needs—though sometimes we may be tempted to forget this truth. For example, we might ask, “If God really loves us, why doesn't He immediately solve all our problems? After all, He could do so with one simple word of command.” However, this wouldn't be to our ultimate benefit or advantage. We grow as persons through our own attempts to solve or cope with our difficulties; through life's struggles, we can become more aware of our need for the Lord, and learn to rely more fully on His grace. When we sin, God doesn't punish us out of anger or outrage, but He does allow us to experience the consequences of our sins—for this helps us arrive at sincere repentance.

In the 1st Reading, Peter and the other apostles informed the people of Jerusalem that they had crucified their long-awaited Messiah. Those who heard this powerful and undeniable message were terribly shaken and overwhelmed with tremendous guilt. God allowed them to feel this way not as a punishment for their sin, but as a stimulus to conversion—and this indeed is what happened. The truth was painful, but liberating. The 2nd Reading tells us that Jesus did no wrong, and had no deceit within Him. This remains true today, and affects each of us personally; Christ desires us to come to the truth—even if our own stubbornness might make this an agonizing process. We were once like straying sheep, but through God's grace, we have returned to Christ, the Good Shepherd, the guardian of our souls.

III. Conclusion

As the Good Shepherd, Jesus warns us of strangers who seek to harm the flock, so we must look at our lives to see if we've followed any false prophets or, more likely, any of our society's misleading values, expectations, or beliefs. If so, the emptiness or alienation we feel, and the uneasiness or problems we experience, should prompt us to admit our sins and turn back to God. Have we wandered into any dangerous places or any spiritual dead-ends? Are our problems God's way of calling us back to Him? For example, if we tend to be very critical or judgmental of others, chances are that sooner or later we'll end up lonely and unpopular—for people quite naturally don't want to spend time with someone who's always finding fault. If we recognize this situation in our lives, it's probably also a message from God regarding our need to repent and change.

Perhaps we tend to be very selfish, always expecting and demanding to get our own way—but such an attitude can easily lead to alienation and unhappiness. When we insist everyone bow to our own desires, we ultimately find that nothing satisfies us, and the people around us finally stop trying to please us. This sort of dissatisfaction and emptiness is a strong and probably unpleasant reminder that we must surrender ourselves to God's will, and start thinking of the well-being of others, instead of only our own.

Maybe pride is a major sin in our lives. If we've not been making an honest effort to overcome it, the Lord may help us along—by allowing us to experience a series of humiliating failures. This is never enjoyable—but it might be essential for our spiritual well-being and future happiness. If we're giving ourselves over to materialism and the pursuit of money, God will allow us to discover that our possessions cannot bring us true happiness; the emptiness we'll inevitably feel can be truly filled only by God's grace. If we tend to have a stubborn or rebellious streak, God will make sure that we do get our way—and we'll then make such a mess of things that we finally realize His way is best.

Sometimes we can be like stubborn sheep who insist on going off in our own direction—and in so doing, we can easily get ourselves into great spiritual difficulties. Jesus is our wise and compassionate Shepherd—but because some of the flock will only learn the hard way, He allows us to experience the consequences of our decisions. Then, when we've come to our senses and are finally ready to trust in Him, He rescues us. If things are going wrong, it's certainly not always our fault. Other people may be treating us unjustly; also, sometimes God is already pleased with us, and allows us to suffer simply as a way of deepening our faith and coming even closer to Him, or of preparing us for future challenges. Many times, however, our difficulties are due to our own misguided choices and values, and our problems are the Lord's way of inviting us to return to Him. At times we may wander off, but Jesus never abandons us. He is the Shepherd Who lays down His life for the sheep—and everything we do should be part of our grateful response.