

## **4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter**

Cycle A, 5.3.20

Acts 2:14,36-41/1 Peter 2:20-25/John 10:1-10

### **WHERE DOES THE BUCK STOP? WITH YOU AND ME!**

I don't like telling too many childhood stories – some of them are embarrassing. Your children know how old your childhood stories can get very quickly. But sometimes those stories can be accurate in making a point. Some of us grew up in a time and place that seemed simpler, more connected. I was about fifteen or sixteen years old, walking home one summer evening. As I got to the house and closed the screen door, my mother was standing there, waiting for me. "Mrs. Szejekowski called a little while ago," my mother said. "She said she thought she saw you smoking as you were walking down Tecumseh Street. [Tecumseh Street was at least four blocks away.] My mother said: "Oh, I told her it couldn't have been you, could it?" I couldn't stand Mrs. Szejekowski, sticking her nose in other people's business.

There was a time when people in neighborhoods kept an eye out for each other and for other people's children, as well. We felt a responsibility for one another. It was a different era, but not so different from what's happening now as so many of you extend your compassion and care for family, friends and neighbors. I recall an article from the Contra Costa Times: *"Is Anyone Responsible Anymore?"*



The author reflected on our contemporary problem of refusing to accept responsibility. He gave several examples that are familiar to most of us -- examples from government – leaders who refused to take responsibility for the false narrative that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction which led to our invasion of that country in 2003; examples of leaders of the Church who turned a blind eye to the abuse that errant clergy inflicted on children and the vulnerable, some of those leaders even rising in the ranks and only now being called to account. Celebrity and professional athlete worship in our culture has allowed our movie stars and sports heroes and public figures to get off the hook easily from crimes which would put the rest of us behind bars. Even our language betrays us. We call it "no-fault auto insurance" and "no-fault divorce" – the bad things that happen are no one's fault. We live without consequences for our actions.



Today our Scriptures offer an alternative to misguided or abusive authority – to leadership that refuses to take responsibility for its own actions or to assist those under their charge who are hurting and vulnerable. The gospel presents us with the image of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who calls his sheep by name. In the earliest days of the Church, the catacombs contained a painting of Jesus the Good Shepherd. It wasn't initially a Christian image. In fact, the painting was

really a pagan god, Hermes, depicted as a young shepherd boy, carrying a sheep over his shoulders. However, like many pagan images and practices that the early Christians adapted, they saw in this portrayal a perfect icon of Jesus, who loved his people with such tenderness and compassion that he was willing to leave the ninety-nine to go after the stray and return it to the fold. Jesus was willing to sacrifice himself in order to take responsibility for the hurting and the vulnerable.

So the Word of God affirms legitimate authority, but also challenges us to use our personal power in ways that make us responsible to one another, caring and concerned as was Jesus, the Good Shepherd. The buck stops here – with each one of us, even though we need heroes and leaders. This fourth Sunday of the Easter Season is often called “Vocation Sunday” because the gospel on this Sunday always includes this image of Jesus, the Good Shepherd. We pray for more vocations to ministry in the Church, those who will help to lead the flock.



But there's also another side to “Good Shepherd” Sunday. It's interesting to note that the Gospel of John shows little interest in structures and roles in the early Church. John's gospel doesn't recount the call and appointment of twelve apostles. It's not Peter who stands out as prominent in John's Gospel, but an unnamed disciple,

simple referred to as “the Beloved disciple.” John's disciples aren't even commissioned to govern or to proclaim the gospel, but to be faithful witnesses who bring people to Jesus. It's Jesus who does the pastoring, who knows and listens to the sheep, who is their way, their truth and their life.

As we enter into the third month now of isolation imposed on us for our safety and the good of the country and our world to mitigate the spread of the Coronavirus, so many of the structures which give order to our lives are still inaccessible to us. That's certainly true for our experience of being Church. We've had to explore new ways or forgotten ways of living daily life as the People of God. Maybe it's not the worst thing that could happen.



All of us are called, fully and freely, to live out our baptismal commitment by which we were each anointed as “priest, prophet and ruler” – as priest by your worship of God, as prophet by your deeds of mercy and justice and as ruler by the humble service you offer to others. You might have heard the response Pope Francis gave a few weeks ago when someone asked him: *'Where can I find a priest, a confessor, because I can't leave the house? And I want to make peace with the Lord, I want him to embrace me....'* The pope said: *Do what the Catechism of the Church says. It is very clear: If you cannot find a priest to confess*

*to, speak directly with God, your Father, and tell him the truth. Say, 'Lord, I did this, this, this. Forgive me,' and ask for pardon with all your heart."*

We each have direct access to God and a personal relationship with Jesus. Your home is your *domus ecclesia* -- your "domestic church." That's why we've chosen this format for our Sunday worship, rather than a setting where you're watching a lone priest in an empty sanctuary -- there are many online Masses like that which you can follow both daily and on Sunday -- but ours is a forum where you can see one another and even look into each other's domestic Church -- the place where you work and pray and play, where you share your meals and live your daily vocation with all of its challenges and joys. Through this pandemic God has given us an opportunity to really claim our faith, to learn how to pray in our own words, without formulas prescribed by others, to know the Good Shepherd, who walks with us through this valley of darkness and leads us to green pastures and restful waters, whose goodness and kindness follow us all the days of our lives.



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