

Sunday, April 22nd
Fourth Sunday of Easter
(Good Shepard Sunday / Vocation Sunday)
By Bill Pitocco

In our First Reading today St Peter said: "... there is no other name under heaven by which we are to be saved." Jesus Christ was sent to the Jewish people, to be their Messiah, to fulfill an ancient promise God made to them. Yet, God was not satisfied to save only one people; he wants his blessing to reach all nations, every person in every corner of the earth. This is why Jesus says, "I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold; these also I must lead..." Christ the Savior, received lordship from his father not only over the little flock of Israel and Judah, but over all the flocks of the earth. In him we all come under one lordship, that of the good shepherd and that Good Shepard is the one pastor of the one flock. The wolf, the devil, works to catch and scatter the sheep while Christ frees and unites us. And even if the wolf attacks the shepherd himself, as he did in Christ's passion, the shepherd has the power both to lay down and raise up his life, so the one flock will never perish. Because Christ the good shepherd is our Lord, the Church, the one flock, will never fail.

Our membership in this flock is perhaps the greatest gift we have received from the Lord after the gift of life itself. This is one of the most compelling reasons behind the Church's missionary mandate. We are all called to spread the good news of Christ, and to "make disciples of all nations" bringing everyone into this one flock. Only the Catholic Church has been given the divine guarantee that it will never fail, never be permanently scattered and destroyed by wolves. Other Churches and

other religions may have sincere believers and parts of the truth, but only Christ's one flock gathered around his visible shepherd's staff - the pope - is guaranteed never to fail.

This part of our Catholic faith is sometimes misunderstood. As Catholics, we believe in freedom of religion. That means that no one should be forced to become a member of any particular religion. To force someone to convert is to violate their dignity as a human being. But some people, and even some faithful Catholics, confuse freedom of religion with what the theologians call "religious indifferentism." Religious indifferentism is the attitude that says all religions are the same, and so it doesn't really matter which one you believe in, as long as you are sincere. That's not true. All religions are not the same. Human nature is the same, and so the religious impulse that we all feel in the depths of our hearts is universal, present in every time, place, and culture. But different religions have different ways of dealing with that impulse. Some religions deal with it by worshipping the devil. Some deal with it by gradually detaching themselves from all activities of earthly life. Other religions deal with it in other ways. To say that all religions are basically the same is a lazy cop-out. It also contradicts Christ's own message. He told the Apostles during the Last Supper, "I am the Way; I am Truth and Life. No one can come to the Father except through me".

Our job is not to try and figure out how God saves those who never hear the gospel or receive an invitation to join Christ's one flock. Rather, our job is to spread the gospel and gather the scattered sheep of the world into our founders church; the Catholic Church. Our good shepherd leads us to the cool waters of Church teaching, a clear, refreshing stream that never stops flowing and is never polluted. He leads us to the rich, grassy meadows of the sacraments, where we can feed on his grace

for free, without ever having to worry about famines or droughts. He truly is our good shepherd.

But are we good sheep? Most of us want to be; that's why we are here today. But even if we already are good sheep, without a doubt we can become better sheep. There are three things we can do to be better; three things that will not only help us improve but also help increase the size of Christ's one flock and help other lost sheep come under the care of the one good shepherd. They are the three Ws. First, the way we treat other people. We are sons and daughters of Christ the King. And so, our manner, our way of holding ourselves, should be full of dignity, generosity, openness, elegance, and joy. If we let God's grace work in our hearts, it will shine through our eyes, our gestures and our way of being and we will become living advertisements for our eternal good shepherd. Second, our work. Whatever we do - job, study, hobby, housework, sports - we, as followers of Christ, should stand out for our responsibility, dependability, and commitment to excellence and integrity.

We are children of God! We are ambassadors of the Creator of the universe! How could we ever let sloppiness, laziness, and indifference contaminate our daily activities? Third, our words. Like Peter in today's First Reading, we should always be ready to use our words to spread truth, hope, and encouragement, to light or feed the fire of faith in the hearts of those around us. As Catholics, there is no room in our lives for gossip, useless tale-bearing, or biting and wounding criticism. In the Eucharist, we receive Jesus Christ himself in our mouths; what a tragic, painful irony it would be if that same mouth were to go out from this church and scatter his people! We are graced to be members of the Catholic Church, the flock of our founder, our Good Shepard, Jesus Christ; And there is no other name under heaven by which we are to be saved.