

Fourth Sunday of Easter



Fear is a crippling feature that is often at the core of our dark journey through active addiction. It has the tendency to freeze us and keep us in isolation. We have turned to compulsive sexual behavior as a remedy for fear, yet when we take a moment to get honest with ourselves, we recognize that our addictive behavior and unhealthy lustful attachments only fueled its ravenous flame.

In order to break free from the darkness of fear, we need a Higher Power who knows our anguish and is willing to go after the stray sheep among his flock. "It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick," Jesus proclaims to those who think they have it all figured out (Luke 5:31).

We can learn much about the nature of our Higher Power, Jesus Christ, through the Parable of the Lost Sheep:

"What man among you having a hundred sheep and losing one of them would not leave the ninety-nine in the desert and go after the lost one until he finds it? And when he does find it, he sets it on his shoulders with great joy and, upon his arrival home, he calls together his friends and neighbors and says to them, 'Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep.'"

This parable makes sense by understanding social behaviors of sheep. Sheep are an animal that rely heavily on their flock for safety, bonding, and purpose. When isolated, they undergo severe stress and demand extra attention until they are properly re-integrated into community. Therefore, the image of the Good Shepherd placing the lost sheep on His shoulders mirrors the grace our Lord offers us as we find ourselves settling into a fellowship we can call our own.

Fear is "an evil and corroding thread" which "touches about every aspect of our lives" (*Alcoholics Anonymous*, p. 67). We had to be lifted by the Good Shepherd in order to overcome fear's paralyzing properties. Once we are active in a fellowship of believers, we are told to stay in the middle of the herd.

This Sunday's Gospel Reading captures the safety and salvation we can expect to find as the sheep of Jesus' flock:

Jesus said:

"My sheep hear my voice;

I know them, and they follow me.

I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish.

No one can take them out of my hand.

My Father, who has given them to me,

is greater than all,

and no one can take them out of the Father's hand.

The Father and I are one."

As we rely on the Twelve Steps and the sacramental life of the Church, we replace fear with faith and begin to experience freedom. Our identity is formed by God's unwavering love for us, which overcomes any obstacles—real or perceived—standing in the way of our serenity.

Reflection Questions

- How have you personally witnessed Jesus as the Good Shepherd?
- How do you compare and contrast your experience of being *among the herd* with the feeling of being *isolated from the flock*?
- What fears have you overcome as a result of your recovery and faith in Jesus Christ?

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Sunday Mass Readings this Week

1st Reading: Acts 13:14, 43-52

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 100:1-2, 3, 5

2nd Reading: Revelation 7:9, 14b-17

Gospel: John 10:27-30