



May 15, 2011 Fourth Sunday of Easter

Jesus said, "Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever does not enter through the gate is a thief and a marauder. But whoever enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep." John 10:1

Dear Friends;

There was a man who was making his way though a train and he kept shouting "is there a Roman Catholic priest on board?" After a while he started shouting, is there an Episcopal priest on board?" Coming nearly to the last car a gentleman opened his door and said, "I heard you looking for a Catholic or Episcopal priest. I am a Baptist minister, perhaps I could be of some help?" Not a chance in hell," came back the reply. "I was only looking to borrow a corkscrew."

Humorous stories such as these remind us that priests, bishops, popes and all kinds of clergy have feet of clay. One of the great Vatican II council fathers, Cardinal Suenens stated, "The clergy can be the greatest barrier to spiritual growth in the world." These are wise words for both lay and clergy to remember.

Today's passage from the Gospel of John reminds us that Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He knows his sheep because he is bonded with them and calls each by name. One of the great things that happened at the Second Vatican Council was that it reemphasized the presence of Christ working in the whole Church. The Church was not defined first of all as hierarchy but as the "People of God."

This was a major shift. The Council of Trent (16th Century) had defined the Church as a hierarchical society divided between clergy and laity. The clergy were the ones who did the ministry and the laity were ministered to. The clergy held all power and the laity were passive recipients. The liturgy of Trent emphasized this; in the Tridentine Missal (prayer book for the Mass) hardly a word is mentioned about the laity.

The laity was passive and it did not see themselves as actively involved in the liturgy or in the mission of Jesus. We used to say the role of the laity is to "Pay, pray and obey." In fact much of Trent's missal reflected imperial and renaissance royal court ceremony. For example in the old mass every time some handed something to the priest or was handed something from the priest they had to kiss the hand of the priest!

The recent pedophilia scandals, here and throughout the world, have shown light on the weakness of a system where some hold all power and others are passive recipients. We must recover the ecclesiology of Vatican II which restores the balance. All are the people of God. The Spirit is present in the whole Church both clergy and ordained. It is Jesus the Good Shepherd who is acting in the whole Body of the Church—not just in the ordained.

To quote St Augustine (5th century important father of the Latin Church) "With you I am baptized, for you I am ordained." This is the model of appropriate leadership in the Church—not a model based on power or hierarchy but on service. Both shepherd and servant are models of humility rather than privilege. Let us pray that we as a Church can live up to our servant leader, Jesus.

Peace,

Fr Ron