

## 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter “Sheep and Shepherds” with Confirmation

Bishop Frank R. Schuster

Peace be with you! It is a joy to celebrate the sacrament of confirmation with you. It has been a long journey, and God has been with you every step of the way.

This weekend is also affectionally called Good Shepherd Sunday. Who here has ever been around sheep? What is your impression? Here is mine. About twenty years ago, my parents and I drove through Scotland, Wales and England. The one creature of all of God’s creation that we saw the most on that trip was sheep. We lost count of the times sheep would just wander on the road in front of your car and stare at you. You could stop, honk your horn, wave your hands, and the sheep would still just look at you, not moving one bit. Very stubborn creatures! Don’t get me wrong. Sheep have some endearing qualities, like lamb chops. However, in my experience, they are not always the brightest creature in the animal kingdom. They are often noisy, goofy, awkward, smelly, and can sometimes follow the crowd right off the cliff...or just simply stand and stare at you in the middle of the road with oncoming traffic.

Now, Jesus this Sunday compares humanity to sheep. This doesn’t feel like much of a compliment, does it? Who wants to be compared to a sheep, raise your hand! As a race, maybe we are at times rather noisy, goofy, awkward, smelly, and stupid. With all the war, injustice and hate we see in the news each day, this feels like a fair critique. During the Easter Season, however, it is very Good News that Jesus reveals himself to us as a savior and Good Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep, even if we feel undeserving of this...especially when we feel undeserving of this.

I personally find the image of being a sheep rather comforting. When I am honest with myself, I know that there are areas in my life that I am not proud about. Don’t we all? Any of us at times can spiritually be like that sheep in the road staring blindly in harms’ way. Sometimes it is good to ask ourselves, what are the areas of our lives that we are like the good sheep who listen to the Lord’s voice? Sometimes it is also good to ask ourselves, what are the areas of our lives that we aren’t listening to the Lord as we ought, maybe even standing defiantly in harms’ way, refusing to budge? And, as so often is the result, how many of us have a catalogue of regrets that pile up inside, that are keeping us from experiencing God’s love in the way he wants to give us?

My friends, whenever we feel that way, Pope Leo XIV has something good to say. He said, “Brothers and sisters, Christ’s resurrection teaches us that no history is so marked by disappointment or sin that it cannot be visited by hope”. Let’s hear that again, “Christ’s resurrection teaches us that no history is so marked by disappointment or sin that it cannot be visited by hope”. Amen to that. My dear confirmandi, the sacrament of confirmation you are receiving today should always be for you a sacrament of hope. This sacrament should remind you every day that with all the worries life can throw at you, God is with you. Even with everything the world expects of you, so often unrealistically weighing down on you, God understands you. Even when you fail, even when you fail, God will forgive you and be merciful

to you if you desire it. Why? Because God loves you. God loves you, and he loves you more than you love yourself. The secret is to just let him into your heart.

Once we do so, once we let Jesus into our hearts, we become ambassadors of hope to others. Indeed, once sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit, we should at times find it difficult to sit still. Like the Apostles, we are called to be ambassadors of the Good Shepherd's love in a world so hungry for it, especially the poor and marginalized. That is how the great saints lived their lives. The invitation is for us to do the same. And so, on behalf of everyone here, thank you for your "yes". May the good work that God has begun in you be brought to completion through Christ our Lord. Amen.