

COLUMNISTS

The 'Good Shepherd' is our model

Sunday's Readings: (R3) John 10:1-10. (R1) Acts 2:14, 36-41. (R2) 1 Peter 2:20-25.

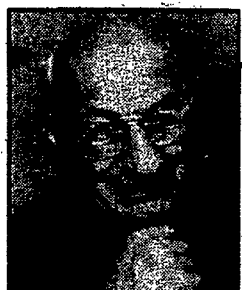
Sunday is Good Shepherd Sunday. Jesus drew the allegory of the shepherd and his sheep after he had witnessed the cruelty of the Pharisees toward the blind man he had cured (John 9). A true shepherd would never have treated his sheep like that.

Peter explains why Jesus is a true shepherd. He laid down his life for us when we "were straying like sheep" (R2).

In the first reading Peter shows himself a good shepherd by urging the strays back to the fold.

Being a shepherd is a thankless job. It really is. Imagine dealing with dumb, smelly sheep all day. In Palestine, flocks of sheep are plentiful. They dot the countryside, clutter up highways, crowd the streets of towns and villages. The shepherd with his long staff walks in front of his flock and his sheep follow him. The dumb, helpless sheep crowd around him so closely that they hamper the shepherd's movement.

A shepherd's life is very hard. The shepherd is never off duty. There being little grass, the sheep were bound to wander, and since there were no protecting walls, the sheep had constantly to be watched. On either side of the narrow plateau, the ground dipped sharply down to the craggy deserts and



a word
for
sunday

By FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

the sheep were always liable to stray away and get lost.

The shepherd's task was not only one of constant vigilance, but dangerous, for, in addition, he had to guard the flock against wild animals, wolves and thieves and robbers. With little pay and little human contact, being a shepherd had little to recommend it. It was a thankless job.

Yet that is exactly how Christ portrayed himself — as a shepherd. The image of Christ holding a lamb in his arms is a familiar one. There is a certain bonding that takes place between the shepherd and his sheep. Jesus put it this way: "The sheep hears his voice, as he calls his own sheep by name."

Sheep-calling contests are common in Palestine. Several flocks are placed in an enclosure and mixed together. Then shepherds whistle a distinctive tune; some call or shout in a peculiar manner. Some shepherds use a pipe

with a particular pitch. Each shepherd's signal is understood by his own sheep and they respond immediately. The prize goes to the shepherd who collects the greatest number of sheep in the shortest time. Sheep know their shepherd's voice and follow him.

The good shepherd knows his sheep. To the untrained eye all the sheep in a flock look alike. But the good shepherd can tell them apart. He knows the peculiar traits of each. One toes in a little. One has a patch of wool off its back. One has a small piece torn out of its ear.

Likewise, Christ, the Good Shepherd, knows our individual weaknesses and failings and watches over his flock with discerning love and sympathetic understanding. Christ the Good Shepherd, takes the trouble to know each one of us by name. Can you imagine that? There have always been people with good memory for names: Charles Schwab knew the names of all 8,000 of his employees at Homestead Mill; Napoleon knew thousands of his soldiers by name. But can you imagine Christ knowing all his sheep by name? That's millions and millions of people over 2,000 years. No wonder we call him Master, Lord, Savior. And he calls us to follow his example.

Christ set the example. He is the Good Shepherd who watches over his sheep. He wants us to watch over each

other. He knows each of us by name. He wants us to know and love one another. He even laid down his life for his sheep. He wants us to live our lives for others. The shepherd's job is a thankless one. Often, serving others is thankless. But one day you will hear him say: "Well done, good and faithful servant." The reward eye hath not seen nor ear heard of.

Father Shamon is administrator of St. Isaac Jogues Chapel, Fleming, N.Y.

Daily Readings

Monday, April 29

Acts 11:1-18; John 10:11-18

Tuesday, April 30

Acts 11:19-26; John 10:22-30

Wednesday, May 1

Acts 12:24-13:5

John 12:44-50

Thursday, May 2

Acts 13:13-25; John 13:16-20

Friday, May 3

1 Corinthians 15:1-8; John

14:6-14

Saturday, May 4

Acts 13:44-52; John 14:7-14

Lutheran guide connects faith and work

"OK, we're convinced. We see that our church should be encouraging and helping people make the connection between their Christian faith and their daily work on their jobs, with their families and in their communities. In fact, we'll even buy the argument that it should be the primary purpose of the church to prepare and support people for their mission in and to the world. What resource can you suggest that will help us do that?"

Up until now, I have always been stuck on that question. There has never been a single resource that I could recommend to parishes and congregations that wanted to make connecting faith and work an integral part of their ministry. Until now. And, not surprisingly, it was published by the Lutherans.

I say that it is not surprising that the Lutherans published this for two reasons. First, the connection between



faith &
work

By GREGORY L. AUGUSTINE PIERCE

people's faith and their daily work was one of Martin Luther's main contributions to Christian thought. He called it the "priesthood of all believers," and it was one of the central tenets of his theology.

The second reason I am not surprised is that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), the main denominational body of Lutherans in

the United States, has consistently kept alive the idea that it is not so much what you do in church as what you do outside of church that is important.

Now the Lutherans have published the best single resource for helping congregations connecting faith and work. They call it *Working: Making a Difference in God's World*, and it includes a sourcebook, an audio cassette, and a set of bulletin inserts. When I first saw it, I was jealous. Why couldn't my church put out something like this? As I read and listened to it, however, I was merely thankful that someone — anyone — had done it.

For here is everything a congregation or parish needs to develop a full, consistent, competent and effective plan for promoting the connection between people's faith and their daily lives. The sourcebook, for example, contains more than 150 pages of helpful items, including easily-adaptable

congregational programs, quick ideas, reproducible pages, and suggested activities. It provides models of what is working elsewhere, stories that can be incorporated into sermons and talks, and other resources that parishes can use.

The audio cassette is a 60-minute tape featuring 14 engaging Christians who talk honestly about their sense of calling in their daily work. The bulletin inserts set contains 12 two-sided bulletin inserts that introduce worshipers to the witness of people like themselves who are working to fulfill God's will through their vocations in the world.

All of these are available at reasonable prices from the ELCA Distribution Service tollfree at 800-928-4648. Any church that is serious about helping people connect their faith with their daily life will order them today.

Pierce is co-publisher of ACTA Publications, Chicago.



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