

## Fourth Sunday of Easter—Year C

The Lord says, “My Sheep hear my voice...” The Lord is comparing us, not to the swift eagle, the beautiful gazelle, the mighty bear, the swift horse, the mighty lion, or the clever and intelligent dog. No, he looks at us as if we’re like sheep. For the fact is, sheep are lowly animals, but they are valuable as well.

I. THE SIGN OF THE SHEEP - In the text, Jesus said: “My sheep...” What does the Lord mean in using sheep as a sign for us? Let's consider some qualities about sheep that may help illustrate what the Lord is teaching.

1. Sheep are WAYWARD – It means that they just tend to wander off. It just grazes awhile then looks up, and looks around and says, in effect, “Where am I?” A sheep will nibble here and browse there and get lost, he doesn't know how to get back to the sheep fold unless the shepherd goes and brings him back. Sheep just keep on going and don't come back. Dogs and cats can find their way home, The horse can find the barn, But not the old sheep. It doesn't know how to get back to the sheep fold unless the shepherd goes and brings him back.

Now don't tell me that doesn't describe us. All we like Sheep have gone astray, every one to his own way (Isaiah 53:6). This is how it is with us. We get easily lost. We need the sheep fold of the Church and we need the Shepherd, who is Christ, ministering through his Pope, bishops and priests. Otherwise we just wander here and there.

2. Sheep are WITLESS - Ever hear of a trained sheep? We train dogs and birds, horses and even lions. But the sheep cannot be trained!

Now we human sheep like to think we are so smart. Sure, we've been to the moon, and we have all this technical computer stuff. But too many of us aren't even smart enough to pray every day, get to Church on Sunday, and follow God's basic directions for life.

We're so witless that we even do things that KNOW harm us. Even the simplest directions from God we either confuse or get stubborn about. We cop an attitude and say “We know a few things too.” That's right, we do know a very few things.

We're so dumb, we think we're smarter than God! We think we have a better way than God's way, and that's really dumb.

3. Sheep are WEAK- A sheep just has no way to protect himself. The mule can kick, the cat can scratch, the dog can bite, the rabbit can run, and the skunk...you know what he can do. But the old sheep? Without the care of the Shepherd and the sheep dogs, the sheep is history. The wolf comes and all he can do is stand there and get killed.

And so it is with us, if it were not for the care of Jesus the Good Shepherd, the world, the flesh and the devil have got us cornered. And if it were not for the Lord, and the power of his grace, we would be toast.

We like to think we're strong. We have armies, we amass political power, monetary power, star-power. It all gives us the illusion that we are strong. But then the slightest temptation arises and we fall. We

need the Lord and his grace and mercy or we don't stand a chance because by our self we are weak and prone to sin.

AND YET...

4. Sheep are WORTHWHILE animals. The sheep is a valued animal. In Jesus' day many a man counted his wealth by sheep. Sheep give meat and milk, produce lambs and wool. Shepherds made many sacrifices in Jesus' day to breed, herd, and protect these valuable animals. And so it is with us. We may not feel worthy at times, but apparently we were worth saving because the Lord paid the price of our redemption. He saw the price, and paid it all. And not with any diminishable sum of silver and gold but with his own precious blood (1 Peter 1:18-19).

5. Sheep WALK together – Sheep flock together, and thus are safer. To be a solitary sheep is dangerous. It's a good way to get devoured.

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8). The scriptures also say Woe to the solitary man! For if he should fall, he has no one to lift him up (Eccles 4:10). Sheep are not supposed to go off on their own, neither are we.

6. Sheep are WARY- Jesus says elsewhere, He who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens; the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers. (John 10:11-14).

Sheep have the remarkable quality of knowing their master's voice and of instinctively fearing any other voice and fleeing from it.

In this matter, real sheep are smarter than most of us. For we do not flee voices contrary to Christ. Instead we draw close and say, "Tell me more." In fact, we spend a lot of time and money to listen to other voices. We spend huge amounts of money to buy televisions so that the enemy's voice can influence us and our children. We spend large amounts of time with TV, radio, Internet.

Yes, we can so easily be drawn to the enemy's voice. And not only do we NOT flee it, but we feast on it. And instead of rebuking it, we turn and rebuke the voice of God and put his Word on trial, instead of putting the world on trial.

The goal for us is to be more wary, like sheep and to recognize only one voice, that of the Lord speaking through his Church, and to flee every other voice.

Are you smarter than a sheep? Do you know how to recognize the shepherd's voice and follow only him? Or are you foolishly running after worldly advice and sinful priorities? On this Good Shepherd Sunday, strive to be a good sheep.

Sheep have this going for them, they recognize only their shepherd's voice and run from any other.