

Perhaps a very few people know why a priest in charge of a parish is called a Pastor. Pastor in Latin means shepherd. And as a good shepherd the job of a parish priest is to take care of the flock of Christ in his parish just as a shepherd does to his sheep. What if the parish priest is not a good shepherd? Here is the solution some people propose.

They propose that every pastor should have two full months of vacation each year, because if he is really a good shepherd, then, he deserves it; and if he is not a very good shepherd, then his congregation deserves it.

Take your own pick which situation applies in my case as I take only a month-long vacation.

Yes, each year this 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter is considered as Good shepherd Sunday. And the Gospel reading is taken from John's chapter 10. The whole chapter speaks of shepherd, and the sheep. Thus, the fourth Sunday of Easter is also called 'Good Shepherd Sunday'. This Sunday is also celebrated as vocation Sunday and the Church invites us to pray for vocations.

However, for us the image of Good shepherd may be bit hard to understand as we do not see any shepherds around tending their flocks. Most of the farmers here keep their live stocks inside their ranches and provide for them. In the United States, most of our ranches are self-contained. By that I mean that the rancher has his own fields for crops or grazing and his own facilities to care for his livestock. I have never seen any shepherd tending his sheep or any other livestock along the side the roads.

In the old Testament God's loving care and concerned is depicted through the image of sheep and the shepherd. Sheep is mentioned more than 200 times in the scriptures. Sheep is most quoted animal in the Bible. Through the characteristics of Good Shepherd God shows us his love towards us. The shepherd takes his sheep to safer and a greener pasture. The primary duty of a shepherd is to protect its fold. There are two types of shepherds: good shepherd and bad shepherds.

There is no dearth of shepherd language and symbolism in the Bible. Israel's kings, prophets, priests, and leaders were regarded as shepherds.

The new testament continues with the same image of good shepherd.

In the first reading we have, once again, Peter fearlessly witnessing to the Lord's crucifixion-resurrection. Peter's proclamation is a kind of defense of his healing of the cripple (Acts ch.3). Note how this same Peter – whom we'd call 'First Shepherd' – goes through a process of knowing -) loving 9 self – sacrifice when Jesus first asks him, "Do you love me?" and, only after his 'yes', ordains him to "Feed my sheep!" (in 21:15-23).

Thus, in today's Gospel in language reminiscent of God's solemn "I am who I am" (EX 3:14) disclosure to Moses, Jesus declares, "I am the good shepherd" in today's gospel. What follows is a lengthy description of the traits of a good shepherd and of good sheep.

Not only in today's Gospel, in whole of new Testament, Jesus continues to use same image of Old Testament and calls himself the Good Shepherd, fulfilling God's oath to his people. His mission is to the lost sheep of Israel. He will leave the ninety-nine in the flock in search of the one lost stray. He will lay down his life for his sheep. He will be the shepherd at the last judgment who will separate the sheep from the goats. He commissioned Peter to be his successor as Shepherd of the flock. (John 21:15). Today the symbol of the shepherd, the

shepherd's crook which we call crosier, is used by Pope and Bishops, successors of Peter and the Apostles, at Liturgical functions.

In shepherding business, a close rapport is established between the shepherd and the sheep because long hours are spent together, sometimes for days and months the shepherd is away from home with his sheep. So, the shepherd practically names each animal and knows them by names. He cares for their wellbeing and even ready to lay down his life for their safety and protection from wild animals in the forests. It is necessary because these animals are perhaps the only source of income for him and his family. And these animals recognize his voice and follow him. The closest analogy to this type of imagery we can have here is with our pet animals. Of course, if you want to understand the image of Good shepherd more deeply, you will have to visit those countries like India where you can still see shepherds grazing their livestock.

Every Christian has a vocation to be good, caring, and compassionate. But, today, there is specific need of many more young women and men who will totally devote their time, talents, and energies to be good leaders, good shepherd.

We are observing this Sunday as vocation Sunday let us pray for more vocations and support vocations in whichever way you can. Some of you have already supported vocations indirectly in faraway country India by supporting the Ordination expenses of my cousin on May 14.,