

4th Sunday of Easter

Cycle B

April 29, 2012 10:30am and 12 noon
Saint Margaret Parish, Bel Air

Running with the Herd

When I was a child, I often watched western or cowboy movies.

I remember sometimes seeing herds of buffalo in those movies. Today, National Geographic specials might show us herds of giraffes in the Serengeti in Africa.

These herds are wandering, setting their own direction, foraging for their own food and protecting themselves. They are on their own.

Sometimes they go into a stampede. Almost always, each animal does what all the others are doing.

There is no leadership or guidance from outside the herd. They have no higher or broader perspective to guide them.

Following the Shepherd

This “running with the herd” is very different from what we hear about in today’s gospel – “following the shepherd.”

Sheep know the shepherd and can tell his voice from other voices. Each sheep, almost personally chooses to follow the shepherd.

They follow the shepherd because they trust him. They know that the shepherd will lead them to food and protect them from harm.

For them, the shepherd is someone outside the flock with a higher and broader perspective to guide them. There is no doubt that the shepherd is very devoted to the well-being of the sheep.

Today, Jesus calls himself “*the shepherd*” and us “*the sheep*.” He wants us to follow him as sheep follow the shepherd and not run with the herd as buffalos or giraffes do

The Differences

With this in mind, let's look at some examples of the differences between "running with the herd" and "following the shepherd" in our lives.

When we are in second grade, running with the herd means that we back-talk our parents or don't listen to our teachers because we see some other kids doing that. Following the shepherd means that we respect and listen to our parents and teachers because they are there to guide us wisely.

When we are in middle school, running with the herd means that we pick on a classmate because others are doing it and it's the cool thing to do. Following the shepherd means that we take up for and maybe even befriend the kid being bullied.

When we are in high school, running with the herd means that we try some drug or drink beer because others are doing it. Following the shepherd means that we respect our bodies and our minds and our health and stay away from these things because they are harmful or high risk.

When we are adults, running with the herd means that we get lured into the consumer culture and buy cars or clothing or other items that we do not need and cannot afford. Following the shepherd means that we stay spiritually centered and seek our fulfillment in relationships with loved ones and with God.

Conclusion

Jesus the Good Shepherd is here at Mass for us every week.

He speaks to us and we hear his voice in the Scripture readings, especially the gospel. He nourishes us and we receive him in the food of the Eucharist, his body and blood.

Here the Good Shepherd is very close to us. He empowers us to follow him and not run with the herd.