

Homily St Pius St Anthony 4th Sunday Easter Year A John 10:1-10

Twice, we hear (vs Jn 10:7 & 9) Jesus say He is the ‘gate’ for the sheep. Well, He also says “I am Good Shepherd” (Jn 10:11). So, which is it? Well, that is the difference between good and bad shepherds! The good are both – shepherd and gate. Later Jesus will say the Good Shepherd “lays down his life for his sheep” (v. 11, 15, 17, 18). Yes, he is willing to give his life, but he also lays down on the ground to **BE the gate** to hold the flock together in an overnight pen, improvised when out in the field (recall that sheep graze and so the flock moves around and spends its time wandering fields going where the grass is green. By the shepherd’s body functioning as one of its walls, he only had to come up with three other walls. Maybe piled up stick branches as hedge walls or stacked stones to make a temporary walls, and he only needed three of them and the shepherd Himself made the fourth wall! This is how the shepherd is also the gate! He lays His life down for sheep. It also means of course, he is willing to give his life defending the sheep, when they are approached by a predator. Which brings us to His mention of ‘thieves & robbers’ – not just four legged predators, but also two legged predators- other bad shepherds. We heard Jesus say in the opening line of the gospel:

Jn 10:1 “whoever does not enter a sheepfold through the gate but climbs over elsewhere is a thief and a robber”

That reminds me of an experience I had one Sunday morning, in a previous set of parishes. I had opened/set up church already, and went back to rectory to grab something I forgot, and got door knock and quickly attended to business. Then, I left rectory in hurry to get to first mass. Afterward, we had children’s church/school between masses, and the 2nd mass was at another location, so it hit me was when I was ‘running’ (*some things never change*) to truck, that I didn’t have any keys in pocket- always keep my home key in left pocket, and truck key in the right. But I had neither of them (& truck spare key is safely locked in house). So, no way in. But, could I’d be so lucky to have left the back door open, NO. Maybe the back window cracked for air, NO. So, at this point I’m considering breaking glass, but I stored couple tools in a box on deck, so I dug out a long screwdriver, and searched out any window with maybe just one latch unlocked – and waa-laa there’s a window leading in to bedroom on front porch that had only one latch locked, (clock is running it is 5 til mass I have 11 minute drive ahead of me), so I pried so hard it bust the latch. I raised it and jumped up, crawling into the bedroom through the blinds and ran toward back

door, and going out there was a guy pulled up blocking my truck in – it was a parishioner who thought he saw a burglary in progress..... I thanked him for checking and then I was off, but his parting word was **“All I saw was bottoms of shoes, not natural to enter thru window....”** That’s true, and why Jesus says, ‘Good shepherd enters thru the gate, not climbing over walls’ – that climber is up to no good! For Jesus here, that would be the Pharisees - they are not shepherds!

But they don’t get Jesus’ message. Jn 10:6 says that “Pharisees did not realize what he was trying **to tell them.**” Jesus is the Good Shepherd and He does care best for his flock: He knows His own-calls each sheep by name, He feeds them, leads them to the best grass & clearest water, tends to their wounds (bandages & carries the weak/injured if needed) and protects them from predators. He warns them to watch out for predators, not only wolves, coyotes, hyenas & foxes but also other bad selfish shepherds.

Jesus calls out these bad shepherds in John 10 as ‘thieves & robbers’ (3x mention & in Jn10:1, 8 & 10-adding in 10 that they ‘steal, slaughter and destroy’). By this good shepherd/bad shepherd talk, He is invoking the familiar Ezekiel prophet passage (Ez 34:2-3) where Yahweh-Father calls out ‘Woe to you bad shepherds, **who pasture yourselves**, denying your sheep –stealing their milk-wearing their hides and even eating them with no regard for their good care.”

Jesus pushes it even to identify these bad shepherds as the Pharisees just mentioned, because in previous chapter (this is Jn 10, but in previous Jn 9) there was a showdown between the Pharisees and Jesus over the blind man Jesus healed (we heard that gospel back on the 5th Sunday of Lent). First of all, there the Pharisees were not helping/serving that blind man at all-they ignored him. And then even after Jesus cured him, they harassed/heckled him, repeatedly interrogating him (bully-intimidating his parents too) and ended up throwing the man now healed, out of the synagogue. Bad enough they weren’t caring for him, but they even attacked his caregiving healer Jesus That’s a textbook Bad Shepherd example! Like Yahweh condemned the exploitative shepherds Ezekiel 34, Jesus says, ‘There you are Pharisees’. Btu they don’t get it: Jn 10:6 said “they didn’t realize what Jesus is **saying to them.** They didn’t **hear** what Jesus was saying to them! They are deaf! They don’t listen to Good Shepherd! They haven’t been listening to their own sheep’s needs, and don’t listen to their own shepherd either! I like how the previous

chapter John 9 had proven that **they were blind** to the good care of people- **they were really the ones who couldn't see** in the blindman story. They couldn't see what Jesus was doing by healing the man. And they show themselves also to be deaf to any call from Jesus for them to change and enter Jesus' flock properly- to adopt Jesus' compassionate/caring style of leading-shepherding. He is trying to call even them back into the fold of good shepherding. But they aren't seeing or listening. So, the Pharisees are showing themselves to be 'thieves & robbers' (aka 'strangers' 10:5 or 'hired hand' 10:12) because they had no love for sheep -they only enriched themselves, 'fleeced' their sheep for their own comfort (like Aesop's fabled wolf in sheep's hide & sneaking over the wall to consume the other sheep) – in it only for what they could get out of it.

But thanks be to God, we have the Good Shepherd Jesus, who loves the sheep so much and lives with them, that He lays down His life for them! He gives us, His sheep, His own life. And this is exactly what we see and hear in this Holy Eucharist every celebration – the good Shepherd laying down His life (giving us His Body & Blood as food -Jn 6:55). His Body & Blood, is our gate, to enter into union with Him - His life in every mass. So, we want to always hear His voice and stay near Him in His pasture.

At St Pius: And today we witness our First Communion class, two young sheep to be fed by their Shepherd for the first time – Tyler Anderson and Eastin Devine. What a blessing!

Ezekiel 34:15-16 “I myself will pasture my sheep; I myself will give them rest.....The lost I will search out, the strays I will bring back, the injured I will bind up, and the sick I will heal”