

Homily — Fourth Sunday of Easter, 2018
by Rev. Bob Schramm, OSFS

Five times in today's Gospel Jesus speaks of himself as a shepherd laying down his life for his sheep.

It's helpful to know:

Palestinian shepherds literally do that.

Sheep are kept safe in a walled pen at night.

The shepherd protects the sheep by laying down across the entrance to the pen.

In the story of Jesus' passion in St. John's Gospel,

Pilate says to Jesus, "Do you not know that I have the power to release you and the power to crucify you?"

Jesus says to Pilate, "You would have no power over me at all if it were not given to you from above."

In today's Gospel, Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd . . .

I lay down my life in order to take it up again."

I have the power to lay it down, and the power to take it up again.

This shepherd is the one who Peter is speaking about in today's first reading "There is no salvation through anyone else."

Peter is hardly implying that no one can be saved without believing in Jesus.

That would leave out an awful lot of very good folks.

What Peter is really doing here is holding Jesus up

as a model for true shepherding,

which is to say true human fulfillment, happiness.

Jesus models for us what it means to be true to your best self.

And being true to yourself is to lay down your life;

to surrender your life to God's way of doing it.

Jesus is the model shepherd.

He shows us the way to lay down our lives . . . and to take them up again.

He shows the path to true power.

True power lies in a willingness to lay down your life for the sake of the sheep.

This year, Good Shepherd Sunday happens to coincide with Earth Day.

God has entrusted us with the Power – and the responsibility – to care for Earth, our common home.

God has entrusted to us the shepherding of our world.

Let's return for a moment to the image of the Palestinian shepherd

guarding the sheep at night,

laying down his/her life for the sake of the sheep.

I subscribe to a monthly periodical called *The Sun*.
The lead article in the current issue is an interview
with a man named Les Leopold.

Leopold speaks passionately about what he calls "Runaway Inequality."

He notes that our country is weighed down with out-of-control health care costs,
oppressive student loan debt, accelerating climate change, stagnated wages
and mass incarceration of mostly poor people.

The inequality Leopold speaks of is that 84 percent of stocks in our country
are owned by 10 percent of the wealthiest people.

This runaway inequality, he insists, will not cure itself.

To reverse the immense injustice, he is seeking to build a mass movement.

Millions of people willing to speak truth
to those who presume they have the power.

Seems to me that is the very place where good shepherding comes into play.
If Jesus is our model shepherd, then we must follow his lead:
lay down our lives, trusting in and being attentive to the voice of God
leading us to a better, safer and more compassionate world.

"Reversing runaway inequality," Leopold says, "is possible,
provided we come out of our 'Silos' (our rugged individualist mentality)
and build a common movement."

I would add . . . A movement based on our conviction
that we all share in the shepherding.

As today's second reading suggested:

There is an invitation here to see in a profound new way
just what Jesus intends to do in and through us.

On the lighter side, a couple of shepherd/sheep stories:

The devout shepherd lost his favorite Bible while he was mending fences out on
the range. Three weeks later, a sheep walked up to him carrying the Bible in its
mouth. The cowboy couldn't believe his eyes. He took the precious book out of
the sheep's mouth, raised his eyes heavenward and exclaimed, "It's a miracle!"
"Not really," said the sheep. "Your name is written inside the cover."

A policeman in the big city stops a man in a car with a sheep in the front seat.
"What are you doing with that sheep?" he exclaimed, "You should take it to the
zoo." The following week, the same policeman sees the same man with the sheep
again in the front seat, with both of them wearing sunglasses. The policeman
pulls him over. "I thought you were going to take that sheep to the zoo!" The man

replied, "I did. We had such a good time we are going to the beach this weekend!"