

Homily

April 21, 2024

4th Sunday of Easter – Good Shepherd Sunday

27:40 – 37:50

Is anyone here named Salvatore? No? If your name was that, it means “one who saves.” How would you like to have that name? That’s an Italian name, but its root is “salvation,” of which we hear a great deal in the Easter Season. Salvation. To be saved.

Salvation basically means to deliver from threat or danger. You and I face all sorts of dangers and threats, don’t we? There’s a person driving a car and they’re inebriated. We’re older and we need those wonderful bars in our bathroom and hand railings on stairwells. As we get older, they become our friends.

You know the dangers and the threats in your life. I’m not going to try to name a whole list. But you and I hope we will be delivered from them, that somehow we will be “saved” from them.

We began this liturgy with the sprinkling rite, to remind us of our baptism. That is when, so long ago, or for some of us more recently, we were delivered from the threat of our propensity to sin. Augustine called it concupiscence.

The setting aside of the power of original sin in our lives and immersing us in the Community of Faith is meant to help deliver us from being plunged into sin or being drowned by it.

And then through life after baptism, we celebrate Confirmation. How many Confirmation candidates are here today? Raise your hand. There’s a mess of you. Confirmation is to strengthen you. And it has strengthened many of us from the power of sin. It seals us with the power of God’s voice.

Then as we all know, we conclude those Sacraments of Initiation with Eucharist to feed us, to support us, to encourage us beyond this threat, this danger of sin. It’s quite a gift that we’ve been given.

However, my brothers and sisters, there is a more compelling definition of Salvation. It is the recognizing or conferring worth on someone or something.

How many here are doing Spring Cleaning? Have you found something that you caught yourself saying, “Oh. Honey, save that. It’s too good to throw away.” Anybody?

Or money. We save money so that it can serve a variety of good purposes.

In both cases, we declare something is worth it, either to save, or to hold for the future.

The name Jesus, Yeshua – it means the same as Salvatore, “One Who Saves.” And Jesus does save. But the most important thing he does for us besides protecting us from sin, is to confer worth upon us. We are precious to the Lord. So much so, that as we heard in the reading today, he laid down his life for us. We are his sheep. We are precious.

In our baptism, we are made into a new Christ, a “Christian,” part of the Body of Christ. In short, we are so worthy in his eyes, that he has made us one with him. And we with each other.

This is Good Shepherd Sunday. It is the Fourth Sunday of Easter every year. We hear from Chapter 10 of John’s Gospel Account. We hear of the Good Shepherd, the Guide, the Protector, the Intimate Leader.

In other words, the Good Shepherd confers worth on the sheep. He watches over and delivers from threat or danger. And he does it constantly. Even when we are lost. We know what will happen. In a loving way, he will come after us.

You know, the Good Shepherd that we hear of is not like the hired hand. As we heard in the Gospel, the hired hand is about money. It’s a job. There is not a relationship with the sheep.

Now this Chapter 10 from which we heard, follows – I know this is going to sound silly, but – Chapter 9. But Chapter 9 in John’s Gospel is about the curing of the man born blind. And if you recall that from the Cycle A readings during Lent, the man born blind simply wants to see. He asks for it and Jesus confers it. He saves him from blindness.

But then there’s a whole kerfuffle that follows. Everybody is wondering, how did this happen? And they question it. They deny it. They even call him a sinner. And eventually the Pharisees and Sadducees throw him out of the Temple. They declared him “not worth it - unworthy.”

But Jesus finds him and confers on him a continued worthiness. Not only from blindness, but because of his faith.

Salvation. To be saved is a free gift. It's given to all humanity. And it's embraced by all who believe in God, but especially those of us who believe in the Lord Jesus, who has enfolded us into his life, that we might live.

Now, we don't know what it's eventually going to look like. We know what we were. We know what we are. But what we will be, as First John said, we don't know. But we do know this: this Shepherd will guide us, protect us from threat and danger, and continue to whisper into our hearts and our ears, "You are worth it." Even to the point of our passing over into eternal life.

I will leave you with a quote from the prophet Isaiah, Chapter 40. You will know it as soon as I begin it.

***Like a shepherd he feeds his flock.
And gathers the lambs in his arms,
Holding them carefully, close to his heart.
Leading them home.***

May it be so for all of us.