

Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate Good Shepherd Sunday. And there is an irony involved in this, as, once again, we have been made poignantly aware that there have been many shepherds among us who have not been good. The news seems to be full of stories about shepherds who have not lived up to their role. Police have been dishonest. Politicians have lied and broken the law. Teachers have abused students, parents have abused their children, and yes, sadly, even clergy have abused parishioners, especially minors.

Friends, it's disgusting, isn't it. People who have been given authority, people who are supposed to be shepherds, protecting the flock, have failed miserably. In doing so, they have created so much hurt, so much damage. And by far the worst is the abuse by clerics in the Catholic Church. Not because it is more prevalent, but because the damage caused by some priests and bishops have severely harmed the entire Church, the entire the body of Christ.

It would be so easy for me to come here today and give a great homily about good shepherds if in fact, the Church had not been rocked by this scandal, if all clerics had indeed been good shepherds. But, since we all know that has not been the case, how are we to understand this feast given the climate of the Church today? How can we celebrate Good Shepherd Sunday knowing that we have a lot of bad shepherds among us?

Well, I think we do this in several ways. First, I think that we need to take a step back from all the media reports and sensationalism. I don't say this to dismiss what happened, but because we have a tendency to allow our anger to snowball out of control. We can easily get caught up in the hype, in the mob mentality that doesn't reflect on the issue, but simply seeks a scapegoat to crucify. That isn't healthy.

When we step back for a second, and reflect upon what Good Shepherd Sunday is about, I think we can put away some of that negative energy. After all, Good Shepherd Sunday is about just that, the good shepherds. It isn't about the bad ones. You see, our tendency is to simply look at the bad, and to ignore the good. We have been trained to do that, right? Almost instinctively we complain about others, our co-workers, our boss, our teacher, our peers. Today's celebration is about putting an end to the complaining we do about others. Our celebration is about the fact that we have a Good Shepherd – Jesus Christ. And our good shepherd has not abandoned us, but has given us many shepherds in our lives who are, in fact, good. This certainly holds true in our Church. A vast majority of our clergy, over 90%, have acted as good shepherds, and have looked after the flock with great care.

Our celebration today is so important, especially as we face the worldwide reports of priests and bishops who have been abusive. It is important because it reminds us that in the midst of this darkness, there are good shepherds in the Church. The Church, as Jesus tells us, is in His hands, and it will not be snatched away. Jesus has given us many good shepherds in his mold, to guide the Church even in this difficult time. In fact, the number of good shepherds he has given us far outweighs the number of bad shepherds by a ratio greater than 9:1.

Jesus tells us that his sheep know and recognize His voice. Certainly we can recognize the voice of Jesus working through the good shepherds among us. We need to look no further than our own shepherd, Fr. Schrader. I don't say this because

he is my boss, or because performance reviews are coming up. I say this in all sincerity. A good shepherd is one who knows his sheep and cares for their needs.

While the process of merging three parishes into one new parish may have been a painful process, I think it was made a lot easier precisely because of Fr. Schrader's acting as a good pastor, a good shepherd who is concerned about his flock. He knew his sheep, and cared for their needs.

Fr. Schrader is not the only example of a good shepherd. I could give several other examples of good shepherds in the Church. But here is the real kicker – being a good shepherd isn't simply the job of pastors. We are all called to imitate the Good Shepherd. As Pope St. Gregory the Great said in a homily, "you have heard the test pastors have to undergo. Turn now to consider how these words of our Lord imply a test for yourselves also. . . I assure you it is not by faith that you will come to know him, but by love; not by mere conviction, but by action." We all participate in the role of shepherding. For example, Parents certainly have a responsibility to shepherd their children. At baptisms parents and godparents are charged with the daunting task of ensuring that the light given to their children remains burning. Friends, these are not just sweet sounding words. This is a mandate. Parents and Godparents have a serious responsibility to shepherd their children in their faith.

Stewardship, which we heard about earlier today, is also part of shepherding. We need to use our resources to promote the efforts of the good shepherds among us. If we're not good stewards, we undermine our shepherding efforts. Fr. Schrader cannot run this parish alone. He needs the assistance of the numerous staff members and volunteers each of whom have reflected on their time and talents, and put them to work in a particular way to assist the efforts of the good shepherds. Similarly, it is no secret that many of our shepherding efforts require financial resources. Without your financial support we would not have phones or email, and Laurie's scripture reflection group would meet in the dark. Our stewardship is essential if we want to support and encourage good shepherding.

It's also important for us to remember that as members of the flock, not only do we act as shepherds, but we are also sheep. As sheep we must also follow those who shepherd us. Recall that Jesus told us that not only do His sheep hear His voice, but they follow Him. Therefore, we need to not only hear the voices of the good shepherds in our Church, but to follow those shepherds who are trying to lead us closer to God. For example, our good shepherds can plan great opportunities for prayer and reflection, but they lose value if no one attends. Our youth group can have wonderful ways to connect our teens with God, but the effort is wasted if no teens attend. Our choir can provide us with beautiful music at liturgy, but we need to join them in singing if our prayer is to grow. Our adult faith formation can bring in great speakers like Sr. Helen Prejean, but their efforts are in vain if we don't attend.

In other words, as members of the flock, we need to not only hear the voice of the good shepherd, but we need to act on it as well. So often we act on the voices of the bad shepherds. We let our anger get out of control, we protest, etc. But today's celebration and today's gospel challenge us to act on the voice of the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, by following Him. This can only be done if we listen to the good shepherds He has placed among us, and follow them.

Peace to you, and to all who follow the Good Shepherd.