

4th Sunday of Easter B Homily

Who wants to be a shepherd? It's a perfect job for somebody who likes being outdoors. All a shepherd needs to do is walk the sheep from one pasture to another, make sure there is a plentiful water source nearby, and fend off any wild animals that attack the sheep. Why do sheep need a shepherd? Can't they take care of themselves without a shepherd? Sheep have an amazing talent for wandering into all kinds of danger; that's why they need a shepherd.

Jesus chose a number of fishermen to be his apostles. He didn't choose a single shepherd to be one of his apostles; although shepherds were probably equal in numbers to the number of fishermen in the region where Jesus lived. Why do you suppose Jesus didn't have a shepherd among his apostles?

A shepherd among the apostles would have been interesting. He would have been busy keeping Peter in line; perhaps an impossible task. A shepherd would have been busy protecting Jesus and the apostles from the crowds; fending off the more aggressive persons trying to get close to Jesus. The children would have gotten closer to Jesus than the adults, who were in need of healing and forgiveness of sins, so maybe that would not have worked too well.

One shepherd per flock is the ideal; no more than two shepherds per flock of sheep will work; one chief shepherd and one assistant shepherd. This is because sheep will follow their shepherds but not another shepherd unknown to them. Jesus was definitely the chief shepherd of the apostles and disciples. He protected them from wandering into all kinds of danger.

After the ascension of Jesus into heaven Peter, his assistant, protected the apostles and disciples from similar dangers and errors. Peter kept the flock, the Church, intact in its infancy. Peter, like Jesus, protected the flock with his very life. From Peter to Francis the Lord has provided a shepherd for his Church. Thank God for this unbroken succession of faithful shepherds. We are the sheep of his flock.