

Fourth Sunday of Easter
May 15, 2011

Have you noticed the number of TV programs today that show the roughest, toughest, and dirtiest jobs out there? There's one called "Dirty Jobs" where the host is trained on how to do anything from cleaning out septic tanks, to working in sewers; making repairs, or wastewater treatment.

Then there's the show called "Deadliest Catch". I can't imagine a more tough and grueling job that's out there. A bunch of men braving the cold temperatures of the Arctic Ocean, and working long hours in the pursuit of catching crab.

I would like to think that if they had TV shows back in the time of today's Gospel, they would have a program called "The Shepherd". The Shepherd you say? What's so tough about being a Shepherd?

After all, they have these cute and fuzzy little sheep to tend. How bad can that be? Well, being a Shepherd was neither romantic nor glamorous. It was a dirty, physically demanding, and dangerous job.

The Shepherd would gather large stones and arrange them in a large circle. They would stack them, one on top of the other to build a wall. They would leave a very narrow "gateway" for the sheep to get in and out.

The stone walls were put up for 2 reasons. To keep the sheep in, and to keep thieves and predatory animals out. The Shepherd would literally sleep across the gateway to guard against any danger that might present itself during the night.

Often, other Shepherds might pen their sheep with other Shepherds and their flocks. How were they able to keep their sheep separate you may wonder? They had no markers, tags, or GPS units to put on their sheep.

We gain a clue from today's Gospel. "And the sheep hear his voice, as the shepherd calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has driven out all his own, he walks ahead of them, and the sheep follow him, because they recognize his voice".

Jesus is the Good Shepherd. We are the sheep; his flock. Are we listening for His voice?

A close friend of mine who shall go nameless, although I can tell you he is a priest here at St. Mary's, and it's not Fr. Dave. Anyway, about a month ago I was complaining to him about some trivial problem that seemed important at the time. He looked at me and said, "Bill, in your world the glass is half empty". "You need to work on that".

That statement stuck with me, and I spent a lot of time in reflection, wondering if it was true. I came to realize that in the busy-ness of life, we can become so distracted, that we shut out the voice of the Good Shepherd. Even in doing God's work, we can be so focused on the task at hand, that we lose sight of the reason we're doing it.

My friends, there are so many distractions, or "other voices", in life that cause us to lose contact with the Good Shepherd. I see people with their "smart phones", texting while driving, and sadly, even during Mass.

People spend hours on the computer updating their "Facebook page" and watching "You Tube" videos. Then there are the video games from Playstation, X-Box, and Wii. Hours and hours of time spent trying to defeat some nameless opponent, or win some sort of game.

It occurred to me then, how do I begin to see the glass as being half full? How do I reconnect with the Good Shepherd, so that I might hear His voice? I prayed about it, and I discovered how. Prayer. That's how we put ourselves in a position to hear His voice.

We have to take time out of our busy lives to pray. Don't think of it in terms of kneeling, and praying for an hour. With the warm weather, people are out mowing and weeding their lawns, or walking, or riding their bikes.

Instead of plugging in your I-Pod and listening to music, try plugging into God instead. Just take a few minutes each day and let the Good Shepherd know you are listening for His voice. You may be surprised by what you hear.