

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Fourth Sunday of Easter, May 7, 2017

This email, entitled Looking to Sunday®, focuses on one or more of the scripture readings for the coming Sunday. It prepares readers to hear God's Word at Mass and it offers a point of reflection to consider in the days leading to Sunday. Looking to Sunday is written by Father Tom Iwanowski.

GO SHEEP GO!

Bears, eagles, panthers, tigers, hawks, rams and colts all have something in common. They are not only the names of animals; they are also the names of sports teams. We have the Chicago Bears, the Philadelphia Eagles, the Florida Panthers, the Detroit Tigers, the Atlanta Hawks, the Saint Louis Rams, and the Indianapolis Colts.

Those animal names all connote the positive qualities, such as strength, power, agility, speed, and cunning that fans hope to see in their favorite teams.

However, no team would choose an animal name that conveys sweetness, weakness or subservience. We would not expect a sports team to call itself the Kittens or the Hamsters.

In this Sunday's Gospel (John 10:1-10), Jesus calls himself a shepherd who watches over his flock and keeps it safe. He also compares himself to a gate that opens so the flock can go out to pasture and closes to keep the flock safe at night.

However, to be a shepherd or a gate for a flock, a person needs sheep.

So in speaking of himself as a shepherd and a gate, Jesus is referring to his followers as sheep. But do we really want to be known as sheep? We would never think of calling ourselves "The Catholic Sheep," or naming our parish, "The Church of the Sheep."

Alluding to people as sheep implies those people are weak, easily led, and unable to think for themselves. As Americans, we see ourselves very differently. We pride ourselves on being strong, self-reliant, independent, creative, and free-thinking. We do not picture ourselves as powerless sheep in need of guidance, protection, and direction.

But perhaps our reluctance to think of ourselves as sheep may be one of the reasons our world is in the condition it is.

Sheep can teach us a thing or two.

Sheep by their very nature are gregarious animals, they flock together. The very word "sheep" implies that. When we hear the phrase, "the sheep in the field," we most likely think of many sheep, not a single animal, not one sheep.

Like sheep, we are made to flock together. We are made for relationships, for community, and to be part of the Church. Christianity is not a religion of unconnected, rugged individuals, but a religion where people gather together to grow in faith and to build up God's kingdom.

Recognizing ourselves as sheep can also remind us that we need a shepherd to direct and guide us. Yet from the first pages of the Bible, humanity has rejected that guidance and gone astray.

But going our own way has not led us or our world to greater peace and happiness, but rather into darkness and sin. Peace and fulfillment only come if we follow Jesus. He is the shepherd who has told us, "I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly."

We need to be like sheep who follow the shepherd. We need to make the words of Sunday's Responsorial Psalm our own, "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. In verdant pastures he gives me repose; beside restful waters he leads me; he refreshes my soul."

The Sheep would not be a good name for a sports team, but it is a perfect name for us to make our own. The more we listen to our shepherd, the more we let him guide our path, the better our life will be now and forever. May we truly follow the Lord, may we truly be The Sheep – His Sheep!

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*May the peace and joy of the Risen Lord
be with you during this Easter Season!*