

Father Dave's Weekly Homily

04/29/12 4 Easter B

-- So often we get it wrong. We think our faith is primarily about believing certain “things” about God, about Jesus, about the Church and so on and so forth. It's true we do have beliefs and they are important.

-- But at the heart of it, our faith is about a relationship. It's about the relationship God has chosen to establish with each and every one of us. God didn't need to create the world or to create human beings. God did this out of pure love.

-- And not only did God create us but he gave us a reflection of his image and likeness. He put a “divine spark,” so to speak, in each of us by giving us the capacity to make free choices, and he gave us the ability to love. That capacity is not present in any other creatures on earth.

-- St. John puts it this way in our 2nd reading: *We are God's children*. God has freely taken us into his family. But we still have the choice to participate in that family love or not.

-- Our gospel gives us one of the most powerful images of God's love for us in the Good Shepherd. In our culture this may be an idealized image of Jesus with a cute lamb on his shoulders.

-- But for the people of Jesus' time, the shepherd had to be a strong individual. He had to deal with harsh conditions: sleeping out in the open, watching for predator animals and thieves, constantly going after stray sheep while they walked on rough terrain.

-- That requires a great commitment. It goes beyond doing a job. It is a lifestyle of care and unselfish love. And that is precisely what Jesus has given us: a commitment of unselfish love to the point of death. Yet he has taken up his life again through the Father raising him from death.

-- Reflecting on the commitment of the Lord God to us, his creatures, is an appropriate introduction to this weekend when a number of our young people are receiving Holy Communion for the first time.

-- They are taking an important step by receiving the body and blood of Jesus in the form of bread and wine. They are accepting the fact that they are God's children. And they are entering into a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ as they do this.

-- Like any relationship, it must be nurtured. The bread of life they receive (and that we receive in Holy Communion) is not reserved for "special occasions" like this. It is regular food for our spiritual journey.

-- And, though each of them and each of us are called to a very personal relationship with Jesus Christ, it is not a solitary relationship. We live this life in the community of the Church. As imperfect as we are, we have to live this life together. We need to gather regularly for worship.

-- These young people need to continue to learn to pray. But they also need the support of the Church. They need the commitment of their parents and families to regular worship and to continued growth in faith.

-- And all of us need the same thing. For that growth is never finished: *What we shall be has not yet been revealed.* God continues to call each of us to nurture his life within us in new and deeper ways.

-- What we say we believe is important. How we live our beliefs is even more important. But how we cultivate our relationship with our loving God is *most* important.

-- For, in the end, our faith is about that relationship: our relationship with our loving God who calls us his children, and our relationship with God's people who surround and support us.