

## 04/22/18 ..... 4 Easter B

-- A priest who had recently been to the Holy Land brought back a story he shared with his congregation on a Sunday when this gospel was read.

-- He told them of a practice that shepherds used there in ancient times and still occasionally use today. When they have a sheep who, from the time it's small, consistently strays away from the flock, they will deliberately break one of its legs.

-- They don't do it to be cruel. It requires the shepherd to carry that sheep on his shoulders until its leg is healed. By doing that, the sheep gets so attached to the shepherd that it will never stray away again.

-- As he told this story, there was a young woman in the congregation who had broken her leg skiing that past week. She had not been to Church for several years and had only come that day because her sister was going and she couldn't do anything else but sit at her home.

-- This story that priest told changed her life. It spoke to her personally about God's love for her, and she began to practice her faith once again.

-- Was this a mere coincidence, or was God at work here? Surely, it would be a mistake to say God made her break her leg because she was not coming to Church. God doesn't work that way.

-- God doesn't send AIDS to punish homosexuals or anyone else. God doesn't send floods to punish countries because of bad things that are taking place. God doesn't "zap" people to make them change their ways.

-- But God can use unfortunate events (like that woman's leg fracture) as an opportunity to make them think. God can speak to us through good and bad things that touch our lives, even if God does not cause them.

-- Today we encounter the Good Shepherd, the one who lays down his life for his sheep. We meet Jesus and are told that he know us intimately and loves us no matter what we have done.

-- Jesus doesn't shield us from all the consequences of our stupid and sinful actions. But Jesus walks with us and offers us forgiveness.

-- And not only that: as our second reading tells us, we are chosen by God to be his children. We are taken into God's family as his adopted children.

-- This weekend, 16 children of God's family and our parish will receive Holy Communion for the first time. God reaches out to them in a special way by giving them and us his Body and Blood.

-- We pray for them and for their parents: may they continue to nurture their faith in the Good Shepherd. As God's children, they need to be nourished with his Body and Blood on a regular basis, as we need to as well.

-- Of course, we are all God's children, no matter what age we may be. God has chosen us for his own and laid down his life for us. No matter what challenges, sorrows or joys come to us in life, we must never forget that.

-- God will not shelter us from every bad thing that may take place. God does not come into our lives to prevent bad things from happening or keep evil from being done by sinful human beings.

-- But God cares for us with the loving care of a shepherd. Sometimes, God even puts us on his shoulders and carries us through times of great trial. God is there for us even when we don't feel his immediate presence.

-- No one has a greater concern for you than God—not your spouse, your child, or your best friend. Once you and I are convinced of that fact, the Good Shepherd can truly change our lives.