

Homily for 4th Sunday of Eastertide (year A) 3rd May 2020

“I have come that they may have life and have it to the full”. (*John 10:10*)

Dear friends, this, now, is not life to the full. Let us face that bald fact squarely and firmly. We may alleviate our immediate needs by phone, skype, zoom, chats in the street; by home hobbies and chores; and by prayer, silence, and Spiritual Communion. But none of these can ultimately take away our deep sense that something about our current existence is very wrong and unnatural. The thief COVID-19 has come “only to steal and kill and destroy” and we are on a war footing. Where is our shepherd? Where is His voice to call us out?

Be kind, be gentle, with yourself and those around you. We are all fragile at this time. Even if you’ve established a new routine and discipline, a new ‘normal’ for these times, don’t underestimate the continued impact it will still be having.

The reflections in John chapter 10 on Jesus as the ‘Good Shepherd’ and the ‘Gate of the Sheepfold’ presuppose one fact that is painfully relevant this year. As sheep, we’re supposed to be in a flock, together in a sheepfold. A lone sheep, a lost sheep may panic and run blindly and be in danger. Elsewhere in the gospels we find the familiar parable of the lost sheep. Sure, He leaves the ninety-nine to go looking for the one; but now the ninety-nine are all scattered in ones and twos as well. He’s going to be a busy Shepherd for some while to come, rounding us all up again.

And yes, a war footing, in this week in which we will celebrate the 75th anniversary of VE day. War is, of course, dreadful. So is COVID-19. But sometimes the Lord uses such times to call people to gifts and ministries they did not know they had or could do. Traditionally this ‘Good Shepherd Sunday’ is a day of prayer for Vocations, most particularly to the priesthood. That prayer is an urgent on-going need. But it only makes sense if we are all responding to God’s call in our lives. This is a privileged time to proclaim the Gospel by our actions. Use it well. The spirit of this time will live on in the memory, let’s see if we can make it live on in reality too.

VE Day marked a clear end point to the War in Europe. It seems as if the end point against COVID-19 isn’t going to be so well-defined. And that’s hard to face as well: that this might be a marathon and not a sprint, with an ill defined finish line. Spiritually, it’s the simple things that will see us through. The simplest of all things is the silence which is given to us at this time. Listen for the voice of the Good Shepherd calling across the hillside for you. That he will come is certain, to gather us into his sheepfold once again, at a time and a place of His choosing.