



DIOCESE OF ST. AUGUSTINE

Office of the Bishop

Dear Faithful of the Diocese of St. Augustine,

The fourth Sunday of the Easter Season is often called Good Shepherd Sunday. The Gospel on this Sunday always includes an image that Jesus used about shepherding. This year — the sheep gate.

The image of shepherd is so important. Earliest Christian art in the catacombs includes etchings of a shepherd. It is an image that Jesus claims for himself — I am the Good Shepherd — which would have riled religious leaders of his day because by using it, he aligned himself with the Father. They would have been aware of the prophet's words,

Shepherds would have been bold ready to keep their flocks together and ready to fend off anyone or anything that might harm any of their flock.

It was through the prophet Ezekiel that God himself — after the Exodus, after all he spoke through the prophets — God announces that He, Himself, would come and shepherd his people. It happens with Christ.

So often the image of the Good Shepherd is romanticized — someone who gently cares for his sheep. Shepherds in those days would have been strong and bold men — ready to fight for his sheep — go after a lost sheep (because of its value in his eyes) and as we hear today — an effective shepherd manages his flock because of their familiarity with the people. The gentleness is the remarkable kindness and forgiveness for when the sheep strays and is found.

Your pastors and parish priests are good examples of the Good Shepherd. They tend the flock assigned them — a portion of the flock entrusted to me. And I am so grateful to them — they bring to you the guidance of our "Good Shepherd." Teens and young adults in seeing their witness may be receptive to the "come, follow me" of the Lord.

I am humbled to be the Bishop of the Diocese of St. Augustine — to be called to be your Shepherd — to be called so that you hear his voice and are able to follow in his footsteps.

Each year at the Chrism Mass — besides the blessing of the Holy Oils to be used throughout the year by me and our priests and the renewal of priestly promises by those priests who serve you, Bishops also renew their commitment of service at the Chrism Mass to you, the faithful. In my mind and heart, I have done so fully.

As all priests do, I remember fondly what and those that led me to the priesthood — then the awe of that priestly ministry — and then some years ago I would be called to become a Bishop, chosen as a shepherd in spite of my unworthiness.

I assure you that I remember all the faithful of the Diocese of St. Augustine at daily Mass. I humbly ask that you remember bishop and priests daily — that we may be good shepherds to you — that whatever we do might help all to hear the voice and hear the words Christ has spoken to us and see the path the Good Shepherd has shown us all to follow.

With kindest regards and every good wish to all, I am

Sincerely yours in the Risen Lord,

+ v. Felipe J. Estévez

Most Reverend Felipe J. Estévez, S.T.D.
Bishop of St. Augustine