



## Fourth Sunday of Easter April 25, 2010 C

### Fourth Sunday of Easter/ Good Shepherd Sunday

#### An Interesting Article on the Sex Abuse Crisis

Traditionally, the Fourth Sunday of Easter is called Good Shepherd Sunday as the Gospel invariably is an excerpt from John 10 in which Jesus uses the shepherd image to speak of himself and his ministry.

The following is a reflection by Fr. Flor McCarthy on one aspect of the Good Shepherd.

*About the middle of the nineteenth century St. John Bosco began to work for poor and endangered youth in the Italian city of Turin. The young people soon realized that in him they had a true friend. They so loved him that once when he got seriously ill, they stormed heaven with their prayers, and some went so far as to offer their lives to God in his place. As it happened, John Bosco recovered. This kind of bond cannot exist unless there is closeness, and closeness involves knowing and being known.*

*Jesus, the Good Shepherd, says, "I know my sheep." He knows his sheep precisely because he is a good shepherd. There are various levels of knowing. We know some people just as a face or a name. Others we know as acquaintances. And others we know as friends.*

*There is a sadness in not knowing people. The Jewish writer, Elie Wiesel, was very attached to his father, who died in Auschwitz in 1944, yet when he came to write his autobiography he declared:*

*I never really knew my father. It hurts to admit that. I knew little of the man I loved most in the world, the man whose merest glance could stir me. I wonder if other sons have the same problem. Do they know their fathers as someone other than the authoritarian figure who leaves in the morning and returns in the evening, bringing bread to the table?*

*I fear that it is a common cry. Children don't know their parents; parents don't know their children. To know takes time and effort, but bears great fruit. When this knowledge is absent a great loss results. Life passes by so quickly. We barely know each other. You can't love someone you don't know.*

*Knowing is particularly important for carers. Carers need to know those for whom they care. To know their names is a good start. But to really know them is to know their life stories. Unless the carers know something about*

*the world from which their clients come, and to which they return, those clients will be little better than shadows to them.*

*The kind of knowing that we are talking about demands time, patience and sacrifice. But it is immensely rewarding. No matter how we might dislike an individual, once we know the person's story, our attitude towards him/her will soften.*

*However, this knowing has to be a two-way affair. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, knows his sheep intimately. But they also know him: "My own know me." Jesus wasn't afraid to let himself be known. But we sometimes are. We refuse to let others into our lives. No one will know what our true feelings, needs, hurts and hopes are.*

*Perhaps it is fear of rejection that holds us back. We fear that if people really knew us for the imperfect people we are, they would reject us. The result is that we will be known for the image we project rather than for the person we are. It would be sad to live and die and never to have been deeply known, never to have told our story.*

*How can we form a bond with people if we keep our distance from them, thus preventing them from getting to know us? Can we blame them if they too keep their distance from us, and if as a result they distrust or fear us?*

A very challenging aspect of a pastor's role in today's church is ministering to a huge parish, which is the case here in Florida and in many other parts of America. Ascension has a sizable community of 3,200 registered parishioners, although between 3,000 and 3,500 attend church on the weekend. These numbers go up during the winter season. When dealing with so many people, it is impossible to know all of one's flock, much less minister to them adequately. While I work hard on getting acquainted with all our parishioners, I realize that there are still many whom I do not know. Thank God, we have plenty of dedicated volunteers in our midst who take on a shepherding role. People in a variety of small groups and ministries shepherd each other. This is always wonderful to behold.

#### **Sex Abuse Crisis—Where the Media Needs to Put the Focus**

*National Catholic Reporter* is generally regarded as a liberal Catholic newspaper. Since 1985, it has spoken out strongly about the sex abuse crisis. In the April 16, 2010

edition, the following article appeared. It was written by Melissa Musick Nussbaum. I think you will find the article very interesting. I did.

*"If it bleeds, it leads." This is the journalist's mantra. We can add to that another adage: "If it's celibate, it sells."*

*In the March 19 edition of CBS's "Early Show," correspondent Allen Pizzey described the allegations of the sexual abuse of minors by Catholic clergy as "a plague of biblical proportions."*

*That's their story, and they're sticking to it. But what is, in fact, the real story in the American church? We know the story of sin, scandal and shame. What is the story today? It might be helpful to begin by asking what we already know, or think we know.*

*If I asked you to name the largest childhood sexual abuse judgment for a single victim against a religious institution in American history, which Catholic order or diocese would you name? Dallas? Boston? The Oregon Jesuits? Los Angeles?*

*The answer? A \$105 million verdict in the case of a single claimant was imposed on the Porter-Gaud School in Charleston, S.C. a school founded and run by the Episcopal Church.*

*Perhaps you are unaware of the Porter-Gaud case because, according to the Cymfony media analysis of the Catholic church's sexual abuse scandal, in 2001 and 2002, only 22 stories about the case were published in the six months after the verdict in South Carolina. Compare that to the 271 stories published during a similar time period about a large judgment against the Catholic diocese of Dallas.*

*Did you know that over 500 childhood sexual abuse claims were filed against the Hare Krishnas, claims that resulted in the eight Hare Krishna bankruptcies in 2004?*

*Probably not, because Hare Krishnas and Episcopalians don't summon the same rich associations as Roman Catholic clergy. Would you buy tickets to a movie featuring a murdering, self-flagellating, albino Episcopal rector? Me neither.*

*David Liberman, the lawyer for the Hare Krishnas, talked about the advantages of press neglect. He said, "Relative to the coverage of the Catholic abuse scandal, there has been little coverage of the Krishna Consciousness sex abuse scandal. As a result, few people outside the leadership of the Hare Krishna movement are even aware of the claims I have described here or of the Krishna Consciousness bankruptcy."*

*Did you know that, according to the study conducted by the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, the number of allegations of childhood sexual abuse by Catholic clergy was just over 50 for 1992? That number declined to around 25 for 2002. According to the Gavin Group audit,*

*the number of allegations stood at 13 for 2008. That's for a church serving 60 million Americans.*

*In January of this year the U.S. Department of Justice issued a study on sexual victimization in the nation's juvenile facilities for the year 2008. They report that an estimated 10.3 percent of youth in state and large non-state facilities report experiencing one or more incidents of sexual abuse involving facility staff annually. That's 2,730 young men and women, and 1,150 of them report sexual contact with facility staff as the result of the use of force.*

*I understand that this story does not fit into a 30-second sound bite. Any journalist interested in the facts of childhood sexual abuse in 2010 has to plow through lots of dry research and pie charts. Neither the "Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report: Sexual Victimization in Juvenile Facilities Reported by Youth, 2008-2009" nor the U.S. bishops' "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People" is light or enjoyable reading. I don't recommend it, unless you want to understand how the church has addressed the problem of childhood sexual abuse, while other organizations have failed to do so. Unless you want to know how the number of allegations of sexual abuse by Catholic clergy has gone steadily and dramatically down since 1992. Unless you want to know where the problem still festers and grows.*

*If a fire is out in one house but still raging in the house down the block, firefighters and reporters need to focus their equipment and skills on the present emergency. We need to give up the easy story line in favor of the hard facts.*

### **Cardinal Newman on Church Failures**

In 1876, John Henry Newman, an Oxford professor and convert to Catholicism, wrote the following words to a friend.

*I do not look at the divisions of Christendom so very anxiously as you do for the Catholic Church presents a continuous history of fearful falls and as strange and successful recoveries. We have a series of catastrophes each unlike the others, and that diversity is the pledge that the present ordeal, though different from any of the preceding, will be overcome in God's good time.... Of course, one's forecasting may be wrong—but we may be entering on quite a new course, for which the civil ignoring of Christianity may be the necessary first step.*

In Christ,

*Le Saran*