

**Good Shepherd Sunday - 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Easter**  
**A Reflection by Deacon Thom Trunzo**



Like so many things in scripture written long ago, meaning and images that were poignant in that ancient culture are lost in ours. For me, today's story is one of those, full of imagery that somehow sweeps by many of us.

In today's Gospel and in others we can reference, Jesus uses these phrases; "I am the Good Shepherd," and "I am the gate through which the sheep enter." So how does proclaiming to be a "shepherd" as well as a "gate" make sense?

The image above is a typical way in which sheep were kept. The shepherd would protect the sheep. They would know his voice and follow his and only his. That part is somewhat easier to understand. But it was the responsibility of the shepherd to live with and sleep with his sheep. The sheep were his primary responsibility. In the above image, we see that the shepherd sleeps at the gate, blocking it, in a sense, with his body. If anyone tries to enter, they must pass through HIM – the shepherd – the gate!

In today's story, we see several parallels of opposites; entering legally through the gate vs entering as a criminal over the wall, believers following Jesus and the Pharisees rejecting him, sheep belonging to one flock following while sheep outside that flock scattering in different directions. The story is rich and, I believe, to be broader than the imagery of the story.

For each of us, we have choices; to follow the Good Shepherd or go our own way, to believe in what Jesus taught or to reject him and embrace other values. This internal struggle between choosing between right & wrong, good and evil, charity and selfishness, forgiveness and holding onto hate and regret are all part of our human condition.

The Cherokee have a parable that depicts this internal struggle:

*One evening, an elderly Cherokee brave told his grandson about a battle that goes on inside people.*

*"My dear one, the battle between two 'wolves' is inside us all. One is evil. It is anger, envy, jealousy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority and ego.*

*The other is good. It is: joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion and faith."*

*The grandson thought about it for a moment and then asked his grandfather: "Which wolf wins?"*

*The old Cherokee replied, "The one you feed."*

Today's Gospel story not only points to Jesus the Good Shepherd, but arouses in us the perpetual questions, choices and ultimate decisions that we must make throughout our lives. It is not simply a one-time choice to follow the Good Shepherd, but an ongoing struggle each day to choose to follow or not. None of us is perfect, so our choices are often inconsistent and waiver from time to time. Sometimes we choose love, compassion and forgiveness. Sometime we choose hate, apathy and selfishness.

Both the Cherokee story and today's gospel remind us that choosing good over evil is a daily challenge. In the above picture, the sheep inside the enclosure chose to follow the shepherd. But that same choice will confront them the next day and every day thereafter. The Cherokee grandfather knows this well as he answers his grandson question, "Which wolf wins?" Many choices will be made over a person's lifetime. Sometimes the evil wolf is fed because poor decisions are made. Sometimes the good wolf is fed because loving choices are made. The struggle persists throughout a lifetime; it is not possible to simply kill either one. But, in the end, when the last breath is taken, the one wolf fed the most will win.

Our call is to follow the Good Shepherd so that, in the end, when our last breath is taken, we will enter through Jesus who is also there as the Good Shepherd to receive us and also the Gate that lets us in!