

Homily for the 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time

“The TV is my shepherd, I shall not want. It makes me to lie down on the sofa. It leads me away from the faith, It destroys my soul. It leads me to the path of sex and violence for the advertiser’s sake. Even though I walk in the shadow of Christian responsibilities, There will be no interruption, for the TV is with me. Its cable and remote control, they comfort me. It prepares a commercial for me in the midst of my worldliness And anoints my head with secular humanism and consumerism. My covetousness runs over; Surely ignorance and laziness shall follow me all the days of my life, And I shall dwell in the house of wretchedness watching TV forever.” I didn’t know whether to laugh or cry when I first read that! It was written by Fr. Tommy Lane, a priest down at Mt. St. Mary’s Seminary in Emmitsburg.

Now, just like most people, I like TV too. And, if you pressed me a little further, I’d tell you I like to watch the news, the Weather Channel, HGTV, and the Food Network! And over the summer, when things are supposed to be a little slower, I find I have a little more time to indulge. Perhaps you do too.

But, what’s the point of this spoof? Well, it’s obviously in the same vein as today’s Responsorial Psalm – Psalm 23, that just about everyone knows. But instead of the Lord God almighty being the shepherd of the flock of the faithful, it’s the television that is the lord of the self-satisfied couch-potatoes.

As I mentioned last week, I was away on retreat the week before – up at the Benedictine Monastery of Mount Saviour near Elmira, New York. And one of their means of supporting their community is raising sheep. So, I got to observe the sheep quite a bit – actually, they were kind of hard not to notice. But, I got to thinking about how we human beings are so much like sheep. First, I’m sorry to say it, but sheep aren’t very smart. They’re not stupid either – but, they do rank just below pigs and cattle in intelligence when it comes to farm animals. So, for example, if a sheep tries to go through a hole in the fence, and the hole is too small, it’ll keep trying to push through instead of backing out! Ever find yourself doing the same things over and over again expecting different results?

Also, sheep are followers by nature. If one sheep moves, the others will probably follow, even though it may not be a good decision. But, they stay together, because they think the herd will protect them. Ever heard the expression “Just because your friend jumps off a bridge doesn’t mean you should too!”? Sounds like good advice to sheep as well!

This next one’s a no brainer, but sheep will run from what frightens them. By nature, sheep are grazers. So, without much means of defending themselves from attackers, like wolves, sheep just run as their means of survival. Did you ever hear of the fight or flight response before? Well, for sheep, it’s more like flight or flight. But, how many of us – adults and children – run from, or avoid, what scares us – whether physically or emotionally?

Now, I'm sure the list could go on and on. But I think you see my point: human beings are a lot like sheep. We even wear their wool sometimes! And like sheep, us people, must have a shepherd – because, like sheep, we've been domesticated too. We must follow someone or something. Obviously in Psalm 23 we hear today that “The Lord is my shepherd”. So, we could just as easily replace the word shepherd with god. “God is my shepherd.” So, who or what is your god? The TV? Music or movies? Sports? Pop culture? Kids at school? Money? Pleasure? Getting ahead? The almighty God Himself? Who or what are you letting shepherd you? And where is that shepherd taking you – to restful waters or away from the faith?

Here's what God has to say about false shepherds in our first reading today from Jeremiah: “Woe to the shepherds who mislead and scatter the flock of my pasture, says the Lord... You have scattered my sheep and driven them away. You have not cared for them, but I will take care to punish your evil deeds.”

So, don't be fooled by any wolves in sheep's clothing – the false shepherds! There is only one Shepherd. There is only one God who was sent to rescue us from our foolishness, our bad decisions, and our tendency to run away when we're in trouble. All of us, like sheep, have gone astray. But fortunately, we have Jesus, the great Shepherd, who leads us in safety as part of His flock, the Church! God bless you.