

April 26, 2026—Fourth Sunday of Easter

The idea of the Good Shepherd goes back to the Old Testament and is fulfilled in Jesus. Kings were supposed to be shepherds to their people—caring for them and leading them and protecting them. As so often happened, the kings sitting upon the throne of David were far from acting like Good Shepherds. Most were power hungry and greedy tyrants who took advantage of their people. This led God to reveal that one day He would come as a true shepherd for His people.

Psalm 23, the Responsorial Psalm, expresses this idea: **“The Lord is my shepherd, there is nothing I shall want.”** The first Christians saw in this psalm the foreshadowing of the three Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Communion. It says: **“In verdant pastures he gives me repose, beside restful water, he leads me, he refreshes my soul.”** This verse was seen as a reference to the water of baptism. Holy Communion was indicated in this verse describing a banquet: **“You spread the table before me in the sight of my foes.”** The anointing of Confirmation in, **“You anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows.”** God, the Good Shepherd would provide all that His earthly representatives had failed to do.

These sacraments fulfill the promise in the Old Testament in the most perfect way. The First Reading from the Acts of the Apostles told us about the result of the sermon given by St. Peter on Pentecost Sunday. When the people heard about Jesus, His rejection and death and resurrection, it said, **“they were cut to the heart, and asked Peter and the other apostles, ‘What are we to do, my brothers?’”** Peter’s response is the response of Catholic Church down through all the ages, **“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”**

God has given every human heart the desire to know Him. To unbaptized adults, He gives graces, called prevenient graces, to acknowledge their sins and repent. It is in the great Sacrament of Baptism that He pours out sanctifying grace so that we can be children of God and heirs to heaven. Acts told us that 3000 people responded to the words of St. Peter and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit; they were baptized on the first Pentecost. Here at St. Gianna’s this past Easter Vigil and throughout the whole world many received the Easter sacraments and entered the Catholic Church in record numbers. The Holy Spirit is still at work, Just as He was at the beginning of the Church.

In the Gospel, Jesus used two comparisons to explain His indispensable role in the salvation of souls. First, He is the Good Shepherd who leads His sheep into safety in the sheepfold, which is the Church on earth and ultimately, heaven. His sheep know His voice, and they follow Him and will not follow anyone else. A tourist in the Middle East asked a shepherd if he could test this. The true shepherd hid himself and the tourist put on the shepherd's cloak and called out as the shepherd did, but none of the sheep followed him. They knew the voice of their shepherd and would not follow a false shepherd. We need to listen to Jesus, and in a sense learn to recognize His voice among so many false shepherds who only come **“to steal and slaughter and destroy.”** One young woman said that her faith was being shaken as she watched podcasts of those criticizing the Catholic Church. I said, **“Oh I am so sorry for you because you could just as easily listen to those who defend the Catholic faith. Then, your faith would get stronger rather than weaker.”** Whose voice are you listening to? What are you watching?

Since they didn't understand the first, Jesus tried a second comparison saying that He was the gate that opened for the sheep to get into the sheepfold. The sheepfold stands for heaven and the only way to get to heaven is by following His teaching and His example and receiving His grace. The priest concludes the Eucharistic Prayer with the words: **“Through Him and with Him and in Him”**. It is only through Jesus that we can enter the life of grace and eternal life. **“Through Him and with Him and in Him”**.