

4th SUNDAY in EASTER (A-7) Are we guardians of souls?

Peter calls Jesus the shepherd and guardian of our souls. What a great image, “the Guardian of our souls.” Guardians, shepherds, both mean the same thing, caretakers. How do we care for the people God has entrusted to our care? If parents, how well am I parenting. If teachers or coaches, how well am I making my students or players feel good about themselves for being in our presence? Am I an instrument of care that brings another peace and joy or not?

You and I are shepherds, called to do as Jesus did. But are we guardians of one another’s soul? That, too, is our call. Priests are both shepherds and guardians of souls. We draw life from being good guardians of souls and the best shepherds we can be.

In the magnificent movie called: A Man for All Seasons, St. Thomas More is speaking with a man, Richard Rich, who is a wonderful teacher, but is tempted to go into politics and positions of status. Thomas is trying to keep him where he has gifts. “Be a teacher. You are a wonderful teacher.” “But who will know I am a great teacher?” St. Thomas said, “Your students, yourself, and God, not a bad company, I must say.”

We all desire to be noticed, to matter for having lived at all. But do we ever think, as St. Thomas did, that all we need to sustain us is to have those entrusted to us as sheep, notice that we’ve done a great job? How do we want to be remembered by our loved ones, by our sheep when we die? Answer it and understand what Jesus meant: That shepherding is a thankless job but a rewarding one.

As a teacher I’ve been lucky to find out what impact I had on some students who came back to thank me. I am a priest. I’ve been lucky to find out how my shepherding has impacted those who’ve listened or watched. All shepherds have listened to insults, received hate-mail, and have been totally ignored. Try defending immigrants to red-necks, the poor to the rich, or workers to management. Jesus says to those of us

who are guardians as parents, coaches, priests, sisters, leaders, and shepherds, that insults and misunderstandings go with the territory.

In our down moments we will ask ourselves, “Who knows that I am a good shepherd?” “My sheep, myself and God.” And there is no greater company of fans that we can have. They are the judges that judge justly. They tell us we matter, we’re noticed, and that we’ve made a difference for having lived at all. After all, our own shepherd, Jesus, has shown us the way, and has called us to help build up his Kingdom. Let us follow in his footsteps, for we have heard and recognized his voice, for he is the guardian of our soul.