

GOOD SHEPHERDS VS HIRELINGS

On the 19th of February 2024, ITV1 began airing a 3-part British medical drama television series, written by Rachel Clarke, and based on her memoir on how frontline NHS staff coped during the first months of Covid-19 Pandemic. This TV series is called BREATHTAKING and was watched by over 2.5 million people on the day it was released. Although many of us knew how terrible the pandemic was, not many of us worked as frontline workers in the NHS. When I watched Breathtaking, I could not believe my eyes at how our frontline workers were exposed to the virus and left to die while they were still expected to care for the so many patients under their care. These frontline NHS workers were working flat-out and many times with makeshift PPE and other resources to save the lives of few patients. When the virus spread around the world and in the UK, many of the frontline NHS workers while treating Covid patients, caught the virus themselves and died from it. When the hospitals were overwhelmed with the virus, frontline NHS workers had to stay an entire weekend in the hospitals without breaks, to save the lives of their patients because of their love and dedication to them. Many of the frontline workers had to check themselves into temporary accommodations to keep their families and loved ones safe. It was so upsetting to see many frontline NHS workers witness the death of their work colleagues, held their hands when their families could not be there and bid them farewell. They did all that because of their love and dedication for their patients. On the contrary, we witnessed so many government officials who were busy rolling out all the statistics to us on daily basis, asking us to isolate and observe all the lockdown rules while they were busy breaking those rules themselves by having lots of parties, snogging each other's faces off, manipulating the statics to fit their narratives, and laughing at the public. It was like a pantomime that clearly showcased those who worked for the public and those who were there for themselves. This is exactly the situation we are presented with in our readings on this fourth Sunday of Easter which is known as Good Shepherd Sunday.

In our Gospel pericope from John Chapter 10, Jesus compared Himself to the Good Shepherd and contrasted Himself with the Hired man/woman. Let us look at the differences between the good shepherd and the hireling as presented in today's Gospel. The Greek words used there for the good shepherd are *Kalos Poimen*; while the hireling is described as *Misthotos*. The Greek word *Kalos* does not just mean good, it equally means honourable, excellent, genuine, noble, and morally good. Yes, the good shepherd is not only good, but he/she is equally honourable, morally upright, beyond reproach and incapable of deceit. The good shepherd manifests his/her moral probity by knowing the sheep, loving them and is ever ready to lay down his/her life for them. Coming to the hirelings, the Greek word used in our Gospel reading for them is *Misthotos* which means a wageworker or a hired servant. For the Ancient Greeks, a wageworker or a hired servant cannot be left on his/her own to manage the business ventures of the owner; the owner must monitor things closely as well as call for

accounts to be rendered on a regular basis. This is because the wageworker cannot attend to those business ventures as careful and as meticulous as the owner would; as such, the wageworker has no personal relationship with the business and would not be laying down his/her life for it. It is this hireling attitude that Peter noticed among the Rulers and Elders of the people and which he condemned in today's First Reading from Acts Chapter 4. Peter chided them for questioning Him and John over an act of kindness they did for a lame beggar in the name of Christ because the lame beggar was not one of their own; in fact, if he was one of theirs, nobody would have questioned them for healing the man. Yes, Peter and John healed the lame beggar in the name of Christ because we are all God's children, and the Father has lavished His love upon us as we read in today's Second Reading from the First Letter of St John Chapter 3.

My friends, in our society of today, there are so many hirelings as the above ITV1 medical drama series showcased; in fact, the events of the past few months are clear indications that we need more people who are good shepherds and not hirelings.

We need more politicians who are good shepherds and who will put the interests of the people over and above their own. We need more Abraham Lincolns and Mother Teresas of Calcutta who can get world leaders together and speak truth to power. We do not need leaders who are longing to have their names enshrined in annals of history for waging new wars and leaving hundreds dead due to starvation and hardships.

We need more bishops, priests and deacons who are good shepherds, who are truly concerned about the welfare of the people entrusted to them and not their own self adulation. When so many people are wounded and broken, we need bishops, priests and deacons who are not just concerned with the type of lace vestments they are wearing, whether they are facing East or West and at the right angle, whether their hands are extended 60 or 90 degrees and whether they have elevated the host and wine exactly halfway between the altar and the heavens; rather, we need bishops, priests and deacons who care passionately for the people and will be there for them in their good and bad times. Yes, we need bishops, priests, and deacons with the smell of the sheep and with their hands dirty because they have been tendering the sheep.

We need more parents who are good shepherds and are willing to be diligent in bringing up their children by instilling discipline and right conducts in them. We live in a world where more and more parents work full time to make ends meet and not enough time is set aside to the children. It is important to note that the family is the domestic church; what happens in our families influences the Church too. Let us ask Christ the Good Shepherd to touch us and transform us into good shepherds for all.

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Homily for the 4th Sunday of Easter, Year B (21/04/2024)