

A NOTE TO PARENTS

The Good Shepherd cares for his sheep, knows them all, calls them all by name, and will lay down his life for them. Generations of Christians have been comforted by the image of the strong and gentle shepherd found in this Gospel and in today's Psalm, the beloved Psalm 23: *"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want ... Though I walk through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, I fear no evil, for you are with me ... Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."*

Locating "Good Shepherd Sunday" in the Easter season reminds us of the great Mystery at the heart of our faith: the Good Shepherd cares for his sheep and he lays down his life for them. On a strictly literal level, this hardly makes sense. A shepherd who allows the wolf to kill him does not necessarily save the sheep ... and once the shepherd is gone, then who will be left to care for them? In the real world, the idea that the one who loves and cares for us might die does not fill us with comfort but with dread or even anger: *How could he or she go away and leave me alone? Who will care for me now?* But children and adults both respond to the Good Shepherd in a way that is not realistic or logical but symbolic. We know, though we can't explain it, that there is something deeply holy about his death; we know that it is precisely because he has already died—has passed through the Valley of the Shadow—that nothing can frighten him or turn him aside. Death cannot touch him, and nothing will snatch us from his hand.

A strong tradition of Biblical literalism in the American Protestant heritage has conditioned us, when we think of Jesus as our friend and helper, to imagine him during his earthly ministry—teaching, healing, and admonishing. But for most of the history of the Church, and especially in its earliest days, knowing and loving Jesus meant knowing and loving the Christ who had died, descended to hell, and risen to be the Good Shepherd of all his sheep. We owe it to our children to awaken them to the deep power of this Scriptural image for their own life of faith, hope, and love.

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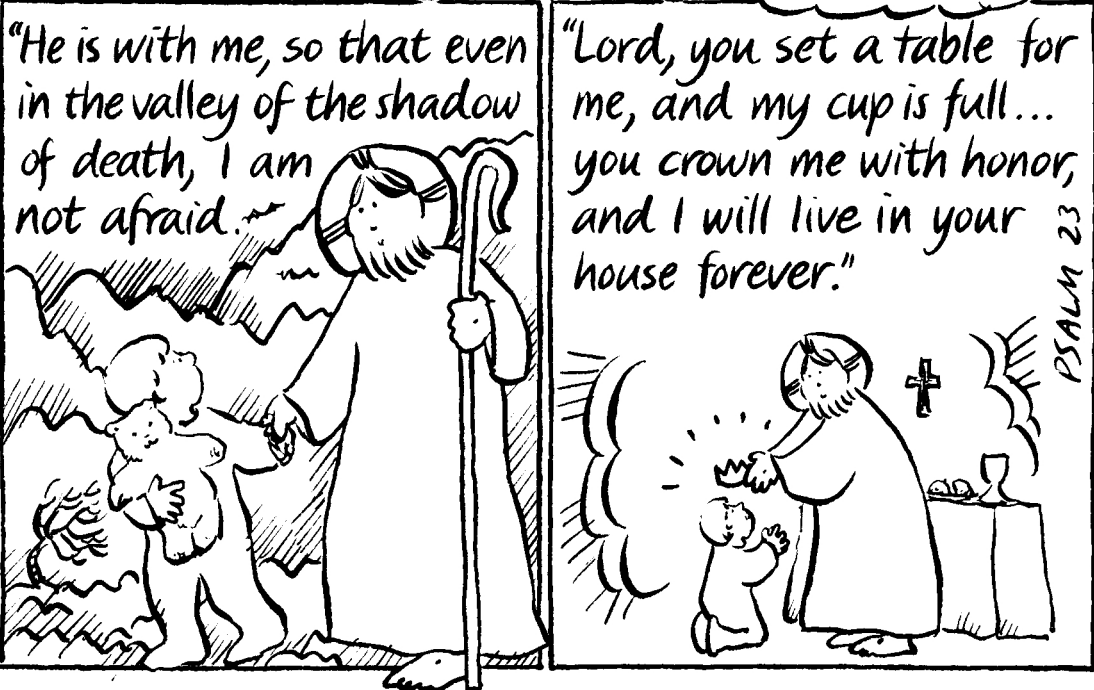
Year A
4th SUNDAY
of EASTER

Jesus said, "The Good Shepherd calls his own sheep by name, and they know his voice, and follow him."

JOHN 10:3-4



THE BIBLE SAYS THAT GOD IS OUR SHEPHERD.



The Bible often calls God our SHEPHERD. A shepherd cares for the sheep, and feeds them, and keeps them safe. Jesus said that he is the Good Shepherd, who would even die for his sheep. He knows them all by name, and they know him.



Draw a beautiful green pasture for the Good Shepherd and his sheep. What are the names of the sheep?