

Fourth Sunday of Easter
April 26, 2015
Homily for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass
of
St. Thomas More Catholic Parish
celebrated at
St. Joseph Catholic Church
Scranton, PA
John 10:11-18

We typically associate Good Shepherd Sunday with our Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, who laid down His life for us, His sheep. We associate ourselves closely with Him, understanding that His sacrifice on the altar of the cross was an expression of His love for us. For most of us, from the time of our youth, before most of us can even remember, He has been our Good Shepherd, who provides the graces we need and protects us from sin and its consequence, death.

We know, however, that to follow Jesus we must take up our cross and follow Him. This means that just as we are called to be crucified with Jesus, so we are called to be Good Shepherds to others. That is, as children of God, baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we ourselves and every single Christian are called to provide graces the faithful need and to protect them from sin and its consequence, death.

This role is easy for us to imagine for our priest, who stands as an *alter Christus*, or other Christ, a dispenser of grace through the administration of the Sacraments, a preacher of the Word, who teaches us how to avoid sin and embrace virtue. But the role of the Good Shepherd is not only one for the clergy to fulfill; and our trip yesterday to upstate New York gave me some examples of just how the laity are able to live into this charge to lay down their lives for the sheep.

Yesterday was our parish's annual pilgrimage to an American saint's shrine. We went to Auriesville and Fonda, New York, where we saw respectively both the site of the North American Martyrs' martyrdom and the site of St. Kateri Tekakwitha's baptism. Both the martyrs and St. Kateri were devoted to the conversion of people overtly hostile to the Faith, the Mohawk tribe of the Iroquois Confederacy. Auriesville, New York, is where St. Rene Goupil, St. Isaac Jogues, and St. John de Lalande gave their lives for the propagation of the Catholic Faith; and St. Kateri's baptism in 1667, just a few miles away, was the fruit of the Jesuit missionary efforts.

Of the four saints whose shrines we visited yesterday, just one was a priest. I've talked and written to you before about St. Isaac Jogues' incredible witness to the Truth, but what struck me yesterday was how he conceived of himself as the shepherd of a flock, even though that flock rejected both him and the Faith he proclaimed. I thought of the words of Jesus from today's Gospel, "I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice." St. Isaac Jogues operated in the confidence that the Mohawk were indeed sheep of Christ's flock; they just didn't know it yet. His job, like that of the missionaries whom the Lord sent to his own pagan ancestors, was to bring the Mohawk into the fold so they would become part of the one flock under the one shepherd, Jesus Christ.

This was an orientation that the laymen of the Jesuit mission adopted as their own. When on their last journey to the Mohawk their Huron associates abandoned them and returned to Canada, St. John de Lalande stayed with St. Isaac. John was a nineteen-year-old, who had only just joined the

Jesuit mission, having come to New France that very year. He accompanied the priest to Ossernenon, as the village was then known, but was not killed when the priest and leader of the mission was martyred on October 18, 1646. The following day, after the Mohawk had eaten St. Isaac Jogues and scattered his remains about the village, St. John de Lalande began to gather these relics for a proper Christian burial. It was then, on October 19, that St. John de Lalande was also martyred, killed while performing the seventh of the corporal acts of mercy, the burial of the dead. We have no relics for either saint because both were then thrown into the stream that flowed by the village.

St. John de Lalande did not abandon his pastor even in death. Like Joseph of Arimathea providing a tomb for our Lord after His Passion and death upon the cross, St. John de Lalande sought even in his youth to demonstrate respect for the dead, to witness to the sanctity of human life and the sacredness of even our mortal remains. In doing so, he provided an example to the Mohawk, for it is only from their reports that we know the reason he was killed. There were no other French witnesses. It should go without saying that in becoming members of the one flock under the one shepherd Jesus Christ, that today the Mohawk do not eat the dead, nor do they throw them into streams, nor do they kill those who attempt to afford them a proper burial. John de Lalande's witness has borne fruit.

St. Kateri Tekakwitha provided for her people even after her death. Though she was one of the early Mohawk converts to the Faith, and thus had to flee her native village for the safety of a Catholic colony in Canada, St. Kateri never lost her love for those she had been forced to leave behind. Immediately after her death at about the age of twenty-four, her fellow converts began using her relics to place them upon the sick and dying, asking her intercession for miraculous healings. So many miracles were effected and recorded in the *Jesuit Relations* that St. John Paul did not require a contemporary one for her beatification.

What came next, though, after all the miracles recorded in the *Jesuit Relations* is even more amazing. Two years after her death she appeared to one of the priests who had attended her at her death, the man who had given her the Sacrament of the Sick, the Last Rites. She demanded that he make a drawing of her because, she told him, "I want my people to know what I looked like." The image he painted is of her glorified body, after the smallpox scars from her youth had disappeared, but the demand itself was a prefiguration of the conversions that would take place later. The Mohawk were by and large not yet Catholic when she provided for her people an icon by which the world could venerate the first Native American Saint. More than three hundred years later, after her prayers issued in the miraculous healing of yet another Indian, she was canonized by Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI. The image of her that hung on St. Peter's Basilica at the canonization Mass was the one she had commissioned in 1682. She had understood that her people were part of the one flock, under one shepherd, before they knew themselves; and she was vindicated as the Mohawk thronged St. Peter's Square on October 21, 2012, to venerate her in the image she had provided. Even if they didn't care the year she died, today her people know what she looked like, and they are grateful for her love for them.

We have to have the understanding of ourselves that St. John de Lalande and St. Kateri had of themselves. We are working towards a future we cannot see yet, but which includes in the one flock of Christ those who today are hostile to the Faith once delivered to the saints. The sacrifices we make for them are the way we lay down our lives for the sheep, the way we bring those into the fold who are not yet part of the flock, the way we, even as laymen, can fulfill the role of the Good Shepherd.