

# TRINITY NEWS

WEEK 18.  
April 30, 2023

*T*oday, the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter is traditionally known as Good Shepherd Sunday. Jesus uses the images of Sheep, flock, sheepfold, Shepherd frequently in his parables and sayings – indeed, they are part of the language He inherits from the Old Testament. – and on this Sunday it is customary to take a closer look at this imagery. And what that closer look reveals, is that though we’re all quite comfortable with the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd and the attendant metaphors of sheep, flock, sheepfold etc. if we stop to think about it the imagery reveals itself as profoundly countercultural.

We modern folk place such a high value on ‘individuality,’ ‘creativity,’ ‘independence,’ ‘autonomy’ and the like – that we can’t but balk at being identified with an animal that is anything but independent-minded, not to mention astoundingly stupid. It doesn’t do much for our self image, much less our precious self-esteem! Do we really need it? Before the Enlightenment, so the prevailing narrative goes, the masses of humanity were ‘sheep-like’ and needed shepherds, but we moderns have moved beyond that stage, we’ve ‘grown up’ we don’t move in flocks and herds any more. And it follows, of course, that as mature, independent individuals, we don’t really need a Shepherd either: we forge our own paths, we do not follow those laid out for us.

But that, of course, is dangerous nonsense. We humans are herd animals at heart, and always have been – we may call our herds tribes, nations or societies, but they remain herds, and we are utterly dependent on them: it is from our herd that we get our language, our customs, our beliefs, our moral sense and most of our ideas. I think it was the philosopher Wittgenstein, who said he hadn’t had an original idea in his life, he only combined pre-existing ideas in an original way – perhaps an exaggeration in the case of the 20<sup>th</sup> century’s most famous philosopher, but certainly it’s true for most of us. In other words, our modern image of ourselves as essentially autonomous, as somehow prior to the society in which we live, is an illusion, and, as I have said, a dangerous one. Dangerous, because as long as we cling to it, we remain blind to the powers that seek to manipulate and control us, and therefore vulnerable to their machinations. Advertising moguls and politicians know this

***To page 2***

***From page 1***

very well, which is why they have by and large abandoned substantive discussion of products and issues and turned to sound bites and emotion-laden symbols which engage, in the end, not our vaunted “critical thinking skills” but rather our underlying herd instincts, while insisting all the while that the ideas and concepts they peddle actually originate with us.

In short, the only real choice before us, the only one that really matters is not whether or not to belong to a herd but which herd to belong to; not whether or not to follow, but whom to follow. And everything depends on the choice we make.

We who gather here this morning have chosen Christ’s herd or flock over the countless other possibilities the world out there offers. In doing so, we have, at least in theory, rejected the illusions of autonomy that the world out there promises, and accepted our need for a Shepherd. It is a move that goes against the grain, because it demands of us that we abandon the image of ourselves as eagles and accept that we are, alas, just sheep. Once however, we do this, we come to realize that those categories are not what interest our Shepherd at all: He doesn’t think in terms of eagles and sheep, leaders and followers; what concerns Him is that we become fully human in the context of a community that is unlike any other, one where the words “follow” and “lead” are both interpreted a synonymous with “love”, a flock whose Shepherd is a Lamb. The WWII Martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer understood this, and it enabled him stand up to the demonic powers and defeat them – and that, as Christians have, in the end, always defeated them – by neither resisting nor surrendering, but focusing all their attention on their Shepherd and allowing Him to lead them out of error into truth, out of sin into righteousness, out of death into life. For life is what our Shepherd is all about.

## **SAINTS:**

**Pandita Mary Ramabai, 30 April. Translator of the Scriptures.** Mary Ramabai was born in 1858, the daughter of a Sanscrit scholar who believed in educating women. Converting to Christianity, she nevertheless remained loyal to many aspects of her Hindu background, pioneering an Indian vision of the faith. She became well known as a lecturer on social questions, becoming the first woman to be awarded the title 'Pandita'. She spent many years working for the education of women and orphans, founding schools and homes. Personally, she lived in great simplicity and was a prominent opponent of the caste system and child marriage. She died on this day in 1922.

**Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, 2 May. Teacher of the Faith.** Athanasius was born in about the year 296 of Christian parents and educated at the Catechetical school in Alexandria. He was present at the Council of Nicaea as a deacon, accompanying his bishop Alexander, whom he succeeded as Patriarch in the year 328. Athanasius held firmly to the doctrines of the Church as defined by that Council, and became the leader of those opposed to the teachings of Arian, which denied the divinity of Christ. He was deposed from -- and restored to -- his See several times because of his uncompromising faith. In or out of exile, Athanasius continued his writings, ever the proponent of orthodoxy over heterodoxy and the essential need for the Church to teach the true doctrines of the faith rather than watered-down versions of it. He was a strong believer in asceticism as a means of restoring the divine image in humanity and thus a supporter of monasticism, which was in its nascent state at that time. He was a friend of Pachomius and wrote the *Life of Antony of Egypt*, which showed the cenobitic life as holding a balance between things earthly and heavenly. He died on this day in the year 373.