

11 May

Today's Gospel gives us the wonderful image of Jesus the Good Shepherd, the one who cares for us, protects us and who knows us one by one. The sheep know the voice of the shepherd, they trust the shepherd, there is an intimacy and familiarity between sheep and shepherd. Interestingly, the author of the Gospel makes clear that the sheep do not recognise the voice of strangers, they never follow a stranger but only follow the voice of the one they know and trust. Last week, we heard the Gospel account of the disciples on the road to Emmaus, they recognised Jesus in the breaking of the bread, their hearts burned within them as Jesus spoke about the scriptures.

Today's Gospel continues the theme of recognising Jesus in our lives. We are called to know his voice, to trust his voice because as the shepherd he is there to protect us from harm. Jesus describes himself in today's Gospel as the gate of the sheepfold. He promises us safety and protection. And this passage concludes with one of the great phrases of John's Gospel – 'I have come that you may have life and have it to the full'. Jesus promises us the fullness of life. He gives his life in order to protect the sheep. He gives his life in order that we may live.

This weekend we celebrate Mother's Day. We honour our mothers and remember their love and fidelity which first gave us the gift of life. Like Jesus in today's Gospel, mothers love and protect us, they shelter us from harm, they nurture us, we trust them, we hear their voice, they are a source of comfort to us in our need. They promise us the fullness of life. As the years pass, I continue to admire my mother, Angela, for her life of sacrifice especially in challenging and difficult times. As the eldest of five children who arrived from Italy in 1957, Mum was hoping to go to school like her siblings. But at 16 she was sent to work in a factory and never achieved the education she wanted. All her life, she worked hard to bring up 3 children as a single mother and now I often wonder how many times Mum went to bed at night worried about finding the money to pay the bills and feed us. But she worked harder to make sure her children went without; she gave herself at great cost. We can all tell stories of mothers who seem to find an unending supply of love, patience, courage, perseverance and sacrifice and who continue to give themselves often at great cost for their families. They are totally

committed to providing the fullness of life for their families, after the model of Jesus himself.

The image of the Good Shepherd, especially as we have it in Ps.22, is a particularly consoling image, especially in times of need. We turn to Jesus the Good Shepherd in times of death and sadness, he protects us refreshes us, embraces us when we are tired or finding it difficult to pray. He is there to lead us in the darkness and comfort us with his protection. In him we find nourishment, rest and healing. When life can be a bit overwhelming at times, Jesus embraces us in his love. The verses of the psalm are truly touching – 'Near restful waters he leads me to revive my drooping spirit; He guides me along the right path; you have prepared a banquet for me; my head you have anointed with oil'. Our mothers love us with a great sense of intimacy; here the word of God reminds us of the intimacy that Jesus brings into our lives as the Good Shepherd.

On the road to Emmaus, in the breaking of the bread, Jesus reveals himself to his disciples. He comes close to us and makes himself known. As the Good Shepherd, he draws near to us to reveal the total whole purpose of his mission – 'I have come that you may have life and have it to the full'.