The Fourth Sunday of Easter April 21, 2024

I remember reading a story about a pop quiz that was given to a new class

of nursing students in the first year of their training. Most of the students did well on the

quiz until they came to the last question, which they all left blank. That question was,

"What is the name of the woman you see every morning who cleans the school?" The

students thought that the question was a joke until they found out that the professor was

counting the question against them. When they protested, the professor said, "In your

careers you will meet many people. All of them are significant. They deserve your

attention and care, even if all you can do is smile and say "hello." The students never

forgot the lesson, or the cleaning lady's name.

To be a disciple of Jesus demands that we respond to every person the same way

The Good Shepherd responds to us all. Every person possesses the sacred dignity of being

a child of God. Just as every baby born is the most important baby ever born, every

person is a unique reflection of Almighty God and deserving of the love and care of the

Lord's presence on earth through us.

This is the reason why the charity of the Christian must reach beyond his or her

own family and friends, beyond the parish family and even beyond the family of citizens of

their country. We must be concerned about those who are hurt, starving, suffering or

dying throughout the world. Our charity cannot be limited by anything including the

parameters of our faith community. St. Teresa of Calcutta, for example, reached out to

the poor of Calcutta and throughout the world. Most of these people were Hindu, not

Christian. All these people are made in the image and likeness of God.

All of this is easy to say, but difficult to do. I know that sometimes I am the worst at

this than anybody. My mind often swirls with too many things to do. I often block out

everything around me as I scurry from one task to another. Perhaps you will do this too.

You might be on the run and totally oblivious to a neighbor who is rather down in the

dumps. Or you might be so caught up in the hectic schedule that you have, that you can

 become oblivious to the needs of those around you.

Following the Good Shepherd requires us to never being too busy to be aware of and

to respond to those around us who need our help.

I heard another true story that also relates to the presence of the Good Shepherd in

our lives. Several years ago, there was a terrible fire in an apartment building in New

York City. A little girl was trapped on the fourth floor of the building, perched on a window

ledge. To make matters worse, she was blind. The fire fighters could not maneuver the

latter truck in such a way to reach the girl, so they set up a net and told her to jump.

Because of her blindness she was too terrified to move. Then her father arrived on the

scene. He shouted to her that he was here and would always take care of her and that she

should jump when he said so. The girl did and was so completely relaxed that she didn't

even break a bone or strain a muscle from the four-story fall. All because she trusted the

voice that she knew loved her.

In the busy-ness of our lives, noise, distractions even our calamities obscure the voice

we need desperately to hear. That is the voice of calm, the voice of reason, the voice of

assurance, the voice of unconditional and unqualified love. This is the voice of Christ

speaking to us in the quiet of our hearts, in the love or our family and friends, in the cries

of all calling out to us. The voice of the Good Shepherd calls out to us calmly and lovingly.

He tells us to take the jump, the leap of faith. He tells us to trust in him because he is

taking care of us.

The Good Shepherd is the Risen Lord. He is with us. He will never leave us alone.

Today we ask this Lord to allow us to slow down and hear his voice.