

One of the early organ pieces I had to play in public was from JS Bach's *Hunting Cantata* — a tuneful piece known as *Sheep may safely graze*. It had been set to sacred words when I was a student in Blairs and sung during Holy Communion at the Easter Vigil. It is not a difficult piece but I can still remember my nerves on the night! Without the words, the music itself is lively portrait of sheep moving around quickly, almost frolicking. I suppose its easy to have an idyllic picture in the mind of beautiful sheep and gentle shepherds. But as I drove up the A708 from Moffat to Selkirk some time back I realised that many sheep were not *safely grazing* but almost on the road at times, yet they seemed unfazed by the traffic on that iconic stretch around St. Mary's Loch. I also saw a young man whom, I assume, was the shepherd and thought to myself, "he has his work cut out", because his flock really is scattered on the hillsides and beyond. I had an inkling to stop and talk to him but didn't. I wanted to ask, "Do the sheep know your voice?"

In biblical times wild goats were also herded into flocks in order to keep the "dumb" (play on the word) sheep safe. The Prophet Isaiah in his fourth *Servant Song* talks of the lamb being dumb before the shearer. Shepherds then, and I assume now too, had and have to be vigilant and protective. In the biblical counties, "keeping the wolf from the door" was more than a figure of speech. The shepherd would need alertness, courage and physical strength.

I suppose that sheep—if they have an instinct—know that there is safety in numbers (just as we ourselves know that). To stay together in one flock is to stay alive. One flock and one shepherd makes good sense. If an individual leaves the fold it will be exposed to danger, and possibly harsh conditions, cold and (maybe?) loneliness. The one flock on the hillside near St. Mary's Loch seemed to me to be scattered, but maybe they were just diverse, like most families, communities and parishes.

Jesus of course draws on the experience of many of his hearers when he uses the analogy of sheep and shepherds to draw parallels to his Church and to the reign of God, God who is both the Shepherd of the sheep and the Gate of the sheepfold. He styles himself as the noble, good shepherd, in contrast to the "hired man" who runs off screaming in fear, abandoning the flock. Five times in today's Gospel Jesus speaks of *laying down his life* for the sheep, while the hired man is frightened by the mere sight of the wolf approaching.



The Easter scriptures invite us to reflect on Peter as the leader of the apostles and on the *Beloved Disciple* in John's Gospel who, from his first appearance in that text, is clearly special. He is a "beloved sheep" who follows Christ the Shepherd faithfully. Peter is never denied his place as head of the apostles, [for instance at the empty tomb, the Beloved One, though he reaches the tomb first due to his youthful running, allows Peter to enter first]. But it is John, the *Beloved One* who at the empty tomb "sees and believes". Peter has more of a journey to embark upon to come to Easter faith. Peter did say earlier that he would lay down his life for Jesus, but his words proved more than his body and spirit could bear and he denied the Lord who would lay down his life for both Peter and John. At the foot of the cross is the Beloved One, John who stands with Mary, and as blood and water flow from the Lord's side, witnesses the birth of the Church.

**A word of thanks:** The family of the late Nessie Shields RIP want to thank most sincerely everyone who sent messages of sympathy, and Mass cards on the death of a beloved mother, grandmother and great grandmother. Your kindness is much appreciated, as is your generosity in collection at Nessie's Funeral Mass, the proceeds of which are going to the work of SCIAF, her favourite Charity. The collection came to £400. Thank you to all who contributed.

**Thank you** for your generosity last Sunday of £819 in the Cathedral, £506 in St Mary's Forebank, and £578 in Our Lady of Good Counsel.

Sorry that the new Cathedral gift aid envelopes are not yet ready for collection, they definitely will be ready for next Sunday. The new envelopes start on Sunday 5 May.

**The Youth Praise Night planned for this Sunday evening is now postponed. Apologies for any inconvenience.**

*Father Jim Walls, Diocesan Vocations Director, writes on this Good Shepherd Sunday, always a day on which we pray for vocations to the priesthood:*

Have you every thought about a life of loving service to others in God's name?

If so, 'Come and See' at the National Enquirers Event for anyone considering the Priesthood on Saturday 25 May in Turnbull Hall, Glasgow. Please be in touch with Fr Jim Walls ([stmaryslochee@dunkelddiocese.org.uk](mailto:stmaryslochee@dunkelddiocese.org.uk); or 01382-611282).

Transport will be arranged from Dundee.

We had a most uplifting Easter Memorial Mass for Mrs. Eileen Marra at St Mary's, Forebank on Friday past, with staff and pupils from Our Lady's Primary School in attendance and leading us in the singing. Our sincere thanks to all who prepared the Mass and hospitality afterwards. Eileen's family are most appreciative.