

## SAFE WITH OUR SHEPHERD: 4TH SUNDAY EASTER B

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Mike and Yvonne, so this story goes, were 85 years old and had been married for sixty years. Though they were far from rich, they managed to get by because they carefully watched their pennies. Though not young, they were both in very good health, largely due to Yvonne's insistence for the last decade on healthy foods and exercise. One day, their good health didn't help when they went on a holiday and their plane crashed, sending them off to Heaven.

They reached the pearly gates, and St. Peter escorted them inside. He took them to a beautiful mansion, furnished in gold and fine silks, with a fully stocked kitchen. A maid could be seen hanging up their favourite clothes in the dressing-room. They gasped in astonishment when Peter said, *'Welcome to Heaven. This will be your home now.'*

Mike asked Peter how much all this was going to cost. *'Why, nothing,'* Peter replied, *'remember, this is your reward in Heaven.'* Mike looked out the window and right there he saw a championship golf course, finer and more beautiful than any built on Earth. *'What are the greens fees?'* grumbled Mike. *'This is heaven,'* Peter replied. *'You can play for free, every day.'*

Next they went to the clubhouse and saw the lavish buffet lunch. *'Don't even ask,'* said Peter to Mike. *'This is Heaven, it is all free for you to enjoy.'* Mike looked around and nervously asked Yvonne *'Well, where are the low fat and low cholesterol foods and the decaffeinated tea?'* *'That's the best part,'* Peter replied. *'You can eat and drink as much as you like and you will never get fat or sick. This is Heaven!'*

*'No gym for a work-out?'* asked Mike. *'Not unless you want to,'* came the answer. *'No testing my sugar or blood pressure or anything?'* *'Never again!'* said Peter.

So Mike glared at Yvonne across the table and said, *'You and your crummy Bran Flakes. We could have been here ten years ago!'*

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As time goes by, we hear more and more reports from people who have almost died, people, in fact, who have been *'clinically dead'*. In all the stories from those who have come back to life, we find very similar details. Thus they speak of

leaving their bodies behind. They speak of going through something like a dark tunnel with a light at the far end. A light like the sun, though it neither blinds nor burns, a light which keeps growing brighter. As they move closer to the light, their whole life, like a short film, begins to flash before them. They see the good and the bad, the ugly and the beautiful.

Looking at their lives in those short flashes, they sense that the light before them is personal, is somebody rather than some thing. Somebody who views the film with them. Somebody who approves their generous and unselfish actions, but not their mean and selfish ones. Somebody, however, who understands and interprets all the components of their lives as a necessary learning process.

All say that the light - some call it Christ, some call it God, some call it light - is kind and protective, humorous and understanding, forgiving and fulfilling. When they come out of all this, they are changed people, better people, new people.

These reports of '*near-death*' experiences are interesting, even fascinating and inspiring. Yet we do not really need them to know what will happen to us. We rely rather on the voice of Christ our Good Shepherd who speaks to us in today's scripture readings. He communicates all that friends and followers of Jesus need to know about their destiny.

As the Good Shepherd puts it in the gospel he has '*concern for his sheep*'. So much so that he states not once but three times, that he '*lays down his life for his sheep*'. He is the one, as Peter comments in our First Reading, '*whom God raised from the dead...*', and '*the only one by [whose] name we can be saved*'.

We may be sure, then, that our risen Good Shepherd, will keep bringing us to green pastures and a magnificent banquet, and that the light of his love will keep shining on us and showing us the way to live. In fact, all who now and to the end listen to his voice and stay together in his sheepfold, will find themselves safe, renewed, changed and transformed in his company.

So we can and will declare with the strongest conviction and the most heart-felt hope, those words from our Creed: '*I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. AMEN.*'

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