

OUR GOOD SHEPHERD: 4TH SUNDAY EASTER (A)

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Mike and Yvonne 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 on healthy foods and exercise for the last decade. One day, their good health didn't help when they went on a vacation 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 and a waterfall in the master bath. A maid could be seen hanging their favourite clothes in the closet. They gasped in astonishment when he 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 ever 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 St. 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'

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

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, we will no longer be at risk of either being lost or stolen away by thieves and bandits. On the contrary! He is both our Good Shepherd and the gate that swings open to bring us to green pastures and a magnificent banquet. So, in fact, the light of the Risen Christ, the One whom Peter today calls '*the shepherd and guardian of your souls*' will be shining on us and on all whom we love. Those other friends of God, that we don't love as much as we should, will be there with us as well, but changed. In fact, all of us who now and to the end hear and follow the voice of Jesus, our Shepherd, Guide and Protector, will be there together, changed and transformed.

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