

A pastor writes of his brother: “My brother has three daughters. As little girls, they were cute and cuddly. But as teenagers, they were a concern and a challenge. He laid down rules, he demanded accountability, on weekends he set a curfew. And to enforce the curfew, he slept at the front door until everyone was home.”

+I remember my mom doing the same thing. I was extra quiet moving in the dark room way after curfew. Then I heard a voice in the darkness, “Patrick.” Busted by the Shepherd. I was only 31.

In today’s gospel Christ says, “I am the gate for the sheep.” In gospel times, sheep of different flocks were herded in a common pasture, an enclosed pasture, with a narrow gate. The shepherd would monitor that gate. Only approved herdsmen were allowed in to tend their flock. Thieves and robbers, wolves and predators were kept out. At night, the shepherd would sleep in the gateway.

That shepherd in the gateway is the image in today’s gospel. “I am the gate for the sheep.” The fourth Sunday of Easter is always Good Shepherd Sunday. Each year the gospel focuses on a different aspect of Christ as our Shepherd.

+It was about 27 years ago on Good Shepherd weekend that I came forth to my pastor about being a priest. I was going to put it off until in his homily he said that those who feel they may have a vocation to the priesthood should step forward. They shepherd let me in that day.

Now, I didn’t step forward as some sort of a saint. I had some things in my past that I wasn’t proud of, as I suspect, all of us have some things in our past that we are not always proud of or guilt we carry with us that weighs us down. Our Shepherd is one who is merciful, that calls to us: “Come to me you who are weary and find life burdensome and I will give you rest.”

But you see, when you open that door into a deeper life with Christ, he shuts the gate to our past and welcomes us through another door that opens us up to a wonderful life of his love. But we must be willing to follow his voice, the voice that says to us, “Do not be afraid.”

Yes, that is a good image of the Good Shepherd, one of comfort and a consolation. But when walk through that gate, we discover that the Good Shepherd is not a one-dimensional image.

There may be times in life in which you really do wonder about that Shepherd when things are rather painful. But the reality maybe he is trying to help and we just can’t see it at the time.

+Took my dog to the vet and she had to have blood withdrawn and then came three shots. I'm holding her head as she cries out and looks at me as if to say, "What are you letting them do me!" Trying to keep her healthy, but she/we can always understand the whys at the time. True of us, as well.

The Good Shepherd also challenges us. He challenges us to be much more than we were in our past. That challenge is a dimension of the compassion of the Good Shepherd.

Modern shepherds of the Church must not only comfort the sorrowing, they must also confront the stubborn. That is an unpopular and unappreciated duty of a good shepherd. Don't worry, the shepherds also get their share of this by the flock!

I could poke a bit. I think new folks coming aboard can do more here. Some are giving much more in proportion than others. Some push back from giving their time to the parish. Can you do more for Cathedral?

Others think that going to Mass once or twice a month counts as active in the faith. I doubt that would go over too well in the work place. Not always easy with the kids, but it is a way of showing them what is most important in life. Different dimensions of the same compassion.

That truth of faith is also a truth of family. Parents must be shepherds of their children. They must not only console the distressed child but also challenge the disobedient child. +I was challenged a lot growing up or perhaps challenging for my parents – it can work both ways!

As kids, we rejoiced when we were granted a bit more freedom, but from that freedom means you can now push the lawn mower or pick things up from the store because you can now drive. "Come on!"

We were happy when we wore them down for a YES, but pouted with every NO. Good parents, as good shepherds, must say both, YES and NO. Different dimensions of the same compassion.

Only later in life do most of us come to appreciate those who demanded accountability and pointed out our failings.

Our best teachers not only encouraged us, they also challenged us. The best teacher I ever had was also the most difficult, as he pushed me not to settle for average and I am better for it.

In school, in family, and in the family of faith. Sometimes love can say YES, other times love must say NO. Different dimensions of the same compassion.

Priest: "When my brother set a curfew for his daughters, and slept at the front door, they thought he was a tyrant. Today, he is the first one they ask to watch their children."

Jesus said, "I am the gate for the sheep. I came that they might have life and have it more abundantly."