

HOMILY
May 6-7, 2006

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Davison, Michigan

A tourist on vacation in Scotland was walking along a beautiful back road in the country when a storm came up. Snow began to fall and the wind howled through the Highlands. As he made his way to shelter, braced against the sudden cold, he noticed that several sheep were emerging from the hollows and from underneath the trees, going to stand on the bare hillsides, facing the storm.

A little while later, he met an old shepherd and exclaimed to him, "Aren't sheep the most foolish of all creatures? Here is a storm coming on strong and there they are standing right in the bitter blast. If I were a sheep, I would remain in the hollow." To this the shepherd replied, "Sir, if you were a sheep, you'd have more sense." Then he explained that down in the hollows, snowdrifts came and with them, death. Instinctively, the sheep knew that their only safety was on the open hills facing the storm.

In today's Gospel, Jesus declares the extent of his love for his sheep: "*For these sheep I will give my life...I will lay down my life freely.*" Like the sheep that did not retreat to the hollows, Jesus risked his life for those he loves. Without thinking of the cost, the Good Shepherd said, "*For these sheep I will give my life.*" Just as the Good Shepherd risks everything for his sheep so they may have life, he calls his followers, his sheep, to do the same.

Today's First Reading from Luke shows that Peter and John accepted the challenge of risking their lives to prove they belonged to Jesus, their Shepherd. Unwilling to retreat to the hollows, unwilling to keep silent or to remain hidden so as to be safe and secure, the Apostles had openly healed a crippled man in Jesus' name and boldly declared that they had done so through the power of Jesus, crucified and risen from the dead. They stood alone and in the open, braced against the danger of being Jesus' disciples, yet they knew they were not alone. They knew themselves to be graced with the power and presence of the Risen Christ, their good and loving Shepherd. Just as Peter and John refused to be silent in the

service of the truth, so too must we speak with our word, with our works and with our lives. Sharing these words and works can be done in many different ways.

Homily – May 6-7, 2006

Page 2

It's hard to get an accurate count of how many different ministries and services are made possible in our parish because of you taking the risk and giving so generously of your time, talent and treasure. I was truly humbled and overwhelmed by the number of you who participated in the Holy Week and Easter celebrations. With so much happening close to home, with the uncertainty of the job market, housing and what is going on in our economy, I am edified, humbled and overwhelmed by your continual response to parish needs, continuing to help us with our parish offertory, the growing needs of Christian Service and Outreach East, the United Lenten Appeal, and ongoing hurricane relief. One of our young members is on a medical mission this week to Peru with over 200 pounds of medical supplies. Twenty-five of our teens are hoping to go to North Carolina this July to be a part of a youth outreach to some of our poorest neighbors. There is much that an individual cannot do alone. But just think – if we all do our share, what good God can accomplish.

We were supposed to have a message from Bishop Mengeling inviting us to do our share for the Annual Diocesan Services Appeal. Since he is in his seventy-sixth year of life, he has offered his resignation to the Holy Father. But he still has to oversee the works of charity that take place.

Last year, more than 30,000 donors from the ten counties that make up our diocese made a pledge or gift to DSA. These gifts made it possible to meet the growing needs of so many from infancy to old age. Your gift can help support a seminarian, teach a child, assist a young couple preparing for marriage, encourage a senior citizen, or offer support for those who struggle during times of difficulty. Hundreds of ministries that help tens of thousands of people are made possible by DSA.

As your Pastor, I am going out and taking the risk of asking everyone to do what he or she can for DSA. Like you, I am very aware of the concerns and economics, especially in our area. But as this storm of uncertainty blows all around us, I invite you to do whatever is possible for this year's appeal. Our goal is \$115,322, the largest we have ever had in our 135-year history. But we are the second largest

Parish in Genesee County and by this time next year, we should be well over 3,100 households with new members joining us, thanks be to God, every day. So, we are not asking for equal gifts, but for equal sacrifice.

Homily – May 6-7, 2006

Page 3

Jesus appeared to Peter after the Resurrection and after Peter had denied Jesus three times before his Resurrection. Jesus didn't go back there but said to Peter, "Peter, feed my lambs and tend my sheep and feed my sheep. Peter, do you love me?" So our Shepherd again come to us asking us to feed his lambs, to tend his sheep, to do what we can to make the Church the words that we speak and the actions that we live.

In the pews are some baskets. I invite you to take the baskets and pass them down to the other people in the pew, to find an envelope, and to consider making a pledge or gift. Many of you received one at your home in the mail. But if not, here is an opportunity for you to do so by taking one of these envelopes and filling it out today or whenever you can. A pledge or a gift at any point in any way will certainly help us meet our goals. So as your Pastor, as your Shepherd, I invite you to join with me in continuing the work of the Good Shepherd. I am grateful for your continuing presence in so many ways and I ask you to take the risk with me like those sheep on the hillside in Scotland and no matter what's going on around you, let's put our feet firmly in the Lord.

2006 DSA Prayer

Lord, Jesus, you are the light of the world.

Thank you for calling us to be your light together as Church.

In you we are one.

*Help us to remember that together we are called
to foster the Kingdom of God here on Earth.*

*Bless our efforts to help us grow into a believing
and loving community.*

*Give us the grace to support generously the
Diocesan Services Appeal so that we may
faithfully do the work of our Diocesan Church.*

May we be loving, just and kind,

*proclaiming Christ in all we do.
May our light shine in ways that serve and honor you.*

Amen