

Easter 4  
4.26.26

The other night, I watched the end of the movie Titanic –starring Kate Winslet and Leonardo DiCaprio. Even though I’ve seen this movie several times, my heart still races as the waters rise in the ship and the passengers begin to realize their ultimate fate.

As the Titanic takes on more and more water, the passengers’ rate of panic increases. The old adage of “every man for himself” seemed to be the order of the day as that tragedy unfolded. The movie depicts people running up and down the decks looking for a lifeboat with little regard for others. Some use their money or their status to seek a place in those lifeboats. A few others use force and violence to secure their passageway off the ship.

The movie did portray a few people who were exceptions to the notion of “every man for himself.” The ship officers did what they could to ensure that women and children were the first to gain access to the lifeboats, with little regard for their own survival. And there’s a brief scene of a Catholic priest praying with a few people gathered at the stern of the ship. The priest’s name is Fr. Thomas Byles. He was traveling to New York for his brother’s wedding. He helped steerage passengers to the lifeboats. On at least two different times he refused a seat for himself on one of those lifeboats.

When the end was near, Fr. Byles prayed with a group of people of various faiths. He gave them absolution and sought to comfort them in their final hour. Pius X, the pope at the time the

Titanic sank, commented that Fr. Byles should be considered a “martyr for the Church.”

Fr. Byles reminds us that we may not always be able to save ourselves. And one thing remains certain, we will not be able to save ourselves at the hour of our death. Fr. Byles’ heroic and saintly action that early morning is a reminder that salvation is God’s gift to us. Fr. Byles pointed those few people gathered around him back to God who was and is the Good Shepherd leading us to everlasting life. Our money, our position in life, and even our own efforts, as ingenious as they might seem at the time, cannot save us. It is only the grace and goodness of God which leads us to life eternal.

On the night before he died and after he washed the feet of his disciples at the Last Supper, Jesus gave a number of instructions to his disciples. Those instructions are contained in the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> chapters of St. John’s gospel. Knowing what he was about to face, and how that would overwhelm the disciples, Jesus told them, “do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me.” (John 14:1) Then he added that he was going to prepare a place for them and that there are many dwelling places in his Father’s house. He reminded them to keep their focus on him since he was the way.

The Apostle Thomas seems to speak for all of humanity, especially in times of worry and fear. He exclaims to Jesus, “Master, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way.” (John 14: 5) And in the next verse Jesus assures him and assures us, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

That same teaching is found in today's gospel from the sixth chapter of St. John. Jesus describes himself as the shepherd. And he adds that he is the sheepgate – the door to our heavenly dwelling and new and everlasting life.

While the images of a shepherd and a sheepgate might seem quaint and endearing, they speak with all seriousness to the reality of who and what Jesus is and what believing in Christ does for us.

This gospel and the images of the Good Shepherd and the sheepgate serve as an admonition to us as well. While Jesus is the Good Shepherd for us, he commands us to care for others as he cares for us. Good shepherding means sacrificing. It means being leaders who are holy and who seek justice for the downtrodden. Good Shepherds are rare, but they ensure a blessed life for sheep who often can't fend for themselves.

There are many around us – in business, in the arts, and in politics – who claim to be or want to be regarded as shepherds. They beckon us to follow them. But there is only one, true Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ. In the end, his is the voice we must listen for. His is the path we must follow. Again, in the gospel, Jesus warns us about such false and temporary shepherds. He calls them thieves and robbers. May we always attune our ears to the one and true Good Shepherd.

While we cannot save ourselves, our gracious God offers us the gift of salvation as we make our priority listening to and following the voice of the Good Shepherd first and in all things.

Our money, our status, or our power are not what brings salvation. As sheep must listen to and depend on the voice of the shepherd in order to not only survive, but to live forever with our God.

Amen? Amen!