

Trusting in the Good Shepherd

Greetings!

All of us are familiar with the text “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want,” from Psalm 23. These words convey the kindness, goodness, and care of our loving Father in heaven. They remind us to trust that God will fill our every need.

In the Gospel according to John, Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd. On the Fourth Sunday of Easter, known as Good Shepherd Sunday, we hear Jesus say that the sheep know his voice and they follow him. He, in turn, knows his own and gives them eternal life.

The image of the Good Shepherd speaks in a special way to young children.

It was this image of the Good Shepherd that the Church drew on when she first began artistically depicting Jesus as the Good Shepherd during her early years. While members were being persecuted and needed to hide in catacombs, art of the Good Shepherd provided comfort and recalled God as a refuge. In frescoes and in statues, the young shepherd Jesus was shown lovingly carrying a lamb over his shoulders, protecting it from harm. After the persecution of the Church stopped, the images of the Good Shepherd became more explicit in depicting the shepherd as God by including a halo around his head.

The image of the Good Shepherd speaks in a special way to young children, who are not far from the experience of being lifted by, and sheltered, in the arms of a loving adult.

Take time as a family to talk about this loving image for God. Find images of the Good Shepherd in books and on the Internet and talk about them. What do they convey? Is Jesus serene? Happy? Serious? How old is he? What does the expression on the face of the Good Shepherd communicate about God? Talk about the love, care, safety, and protection that God provides to each of us. In what ways does God, through the gifts of creation and other people, care for our every need?

Place on your dinner table the figures of the baby Jesus and the shepherds from your crèche. Share with your children that, while Jesus lived, shepherds were social outcasts. At night



The Gospel on the Fourth Sunday of Easter provides an opportunity to show children how God lovingly cares for his children.

they lay down with their flocks, using their bodies as the gate for the pen. They were dirty and smelly. Why would the news of Jesus’ birth come to shepherds, people who were considered undesirable? Why would Jesus use this image for himself? Talk about God as being unafraid of our “smelliness”! Even if we sin or fall short, he is waiting to seek us out and gather us up in his arms. He will find us when we are lost, and embrace us with forgiveness whenever we turn to him in need.