HOMILY – THE GOOD SHEPHERD 2016 – 17 APRIL 2016

Today's Gospel of John 10: 27-30 reminds us of the close relationship between Jesus and us.

> *"My sheep hear my voice.*
> *I know them, and they follow me.*
> *I give them eternal life, and they will never perish.*
> *No one will snatch them out of my hand."*

We call Jesus 'The Good Shepherd' and we know Jesus has people in our lives who help to shepherd us.
In John 10: 11 Jesus says of himself,

> *"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."*

We are called to lay down our lives in different ways for others.
Let's take a recent example of a couple very much in love.

On Friday I was privileged to reflect at the funeral service of a good friend.
He suffered from Motor Neurone Disease (MND), seeing the gradual loss of speech, use of hands and feet.
His wish was to stay at home, and to be at home when he died.
He and his wife have loved each other deeply over the decades.
They were shepherds to each other.

Two Bible Readings were read at the service.
Each gave depth to the image of the shepherd.

Let us take one of the readings: Matthew 25: 37 – 40,

> *"Then the righteous will answer him,*
> *'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food,*
> *or thirsty and gave you something to drink?*
> *And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you,*
> *or naked and gave you clothing,*
> *And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?*
> *Then the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least*
> *of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."*

His wife fed him during his illness until he reached Nil by Mouth,
She quenched his thirst.
She gave him his medication.
She cooled his face when it he was hot.
She checked on him regularly.
She changed his clothing.
She greeted visitors and brought them into his room to see him.
She coordinated with doctors and nurses and others, and thanked each of them.

And to go the distance, very tired at times, she would let others take over the caring role for a while.
And eventually a night nurse coming to help.

And so as not to feel imprisoned by his illness, his loving partner would talk to him and help him remember their shared life.
She would soothe his fears.
She would wheel him outside to another room to see God's creation outside and to catch nature's breeze.
And show him the grandchildren when they came.

He had a very deep gratitude to his wife, and to his children.
His incredible gratitude extended to people who visited him in his illness.
He was very grateful to nurses and others who came to see him.
He could see Jesus in the visits of people to him.
At one stage he could only communicate by pointing his big toe at a board of letters.
People would follow letter by letter, patiently.

With great meaning his toe would point to each letter as he said **T H A N K Y O U**.
He pointed out a message to me **N E V E R L O S T T H E F A I T H**.
And briefly, letter by letter, he told me of special moments of faith in his life.

In his illness, someone from the parish would visit him and bring him Holy Communion.
When his illness reached the stage of nil by mouth, someone would still come and pray with him.

He'd want me to pray for people, he named, who were doing it hard.
At the funeral service we kept his wish to pray for someone struggling,
even though we weren't told the name of the person for whom we prayed.

Both have been loving shepherds to each other.

Of course, Jesus went further in today's Gospel and offered him ETERNAL LIFE.

Other passages in the Bible fill out what it means in practical ways, in loving ways,
to be a SHEPHERD TO OTHERS, and to be a shepherd to EACH OTHER.
Not just following the model of Jesus, but being loved by Jesus to follow him in loving others.

Jesus, you are the Good Shepherd.
We hear Your VOICE.
We are part of your FLOCK.
We follow You, JESUS.
Help us to be loving and caring shepherds.
Amen.

[Fr. Gerry Hefferan – Homily – The Good Shepherd 2016 - 17 April 2016]
[Readings: http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/041716.cfm]