

Homily for the 4th Sunday of Easter

Once upon a time a man fell into a pit and couldn't get himself out. A sensitive person came along and said: "I feel for you down there." A practical person came along and said, "I knew you were going to fall in sooner or later." A self-righteous person said: "Only bad people fall into a pit." A mathematician calculated how far he fell. A news reporter wanted an exclusive story on his pit. An IRS agent asked if he were paying taxes on the pit. A self-pitying person said: "You haven't seen anything until you've seen **my** pit." An optimist said: "Things could be worse." A pessimist said: "Things **will** get worse."

But Jesus, on seeing the man, took him by the hand and lifted him out of the pit!

Jesus lifting us out of the pit. What a perfect image to help us understand what Jesus means when He says: "I am the Good Shepherd."

I recall the story of a friend of mine...a classmate from high school whom I hadn't seen in nearly twenty years. In high school he was abrasive and a bully. Running into him some twenty years later was not high on my agenda. However, God works in strange ways.

When our paths did cross, the man I met was not the student I knew. He was a much humbler, kinder and gentler human being than the

one I remembered. In the conversation that evening I learned that while successful earlier in life, his luck had gone sour. He worked harder and longer and only encountered one failure after another. And while wallowing in a very dark valley, he ended up drifting away from his wife and three sons. One day he woke up and realized that his life was in shambles. Suddenly it hit him that he was falling into a pit that was so deep, he couldn't even see the light of day.

It was then that he got on his knees and with tear-filled eyes came before Christ and said: "I've failed. Please help me! Please show me what to do and where to go!" My classmate told me that from that moment on his life changed. Everything that he had lost slowly but surely returned. But there was a difference...and the difference was that he knew that it was Christ who lifted him out of the pit. And he would never forget that.

How often do we find ourselves in a pit...unemployment, addiction, debt, loneliness, illness, concern for our future, worried about those we love, plagued by our past mistakes...life can be filled with frightening pits.

Christ is the Good Shepherd and He's here to help us...but He will never force us. He simply invites us...invites us to take His hand. Do we have the courage to admit that we are trapped in a pit? Are we able to

reach up and let him lift us out? Are we willing to let Christ be our Good Shepherd?