



By Pat Haggerty

We have been so enriched during this Easter season with beautiful gospels. We experienced the doubt of Thomas and the Lord's peace on Divine Mercy Sunday. We traveled the road to Emmaus with the two disciples of the Lord, who shared bread with Him on their journey. We receive consolation and further peace when we hear the story of the good shepherd on the Fourth Sunday of Easter.

There is nothing more beautiful than the image of the Lord carrying the sheep on His shoulders. The image shows compassion, caring, strength and even docility. There is something so dichotomous about the image of the shepherd. Within him there is strength and a commitment to his flock. Yet, he shows a softness and gentleness in supporting that sheep.

What an image for us to reflect on! What amazing words from John for us to consider: "I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I will lay down my life for the sheep." (10:11)

If we ponder that image and those words---and really think about them, they can become for us a source of refreshment, consolation and joy. We are not alone. We have help. We are known. Many of our fears stem from a feeling of isolation and loneliness. Sometimes we feel that we must face our struggles alone. Furthermore, how often have we thought that no one understands us!

All those concerns can be resolved in the Good Shepherd. He is our strength and support. He holds us when times are tough. He knows us and is willing to go to any end to protect us. He showed us by laying down His life for us. He is the ultimate shepherd.

When I think of the story of the Good Shepherd, I also consider the story of "Footprints in the Sand." We are all familiar with that anecdote. It tells of the person walking on the beach with the Lord. Sometimes there are two sets of footprints and, at other times, only one. The person questions the Lord about the one set of footprints on the beach instead of two. In response, the Lord says, "My precious, precious child. I love you, and I would never, never leave you during your times of trial and suffering. When you saw only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you."

Let us remember that we never have to experience our difficulties alone. The Good Shepherd is always there for us---carrying us through the tough times. Take solace in the words of Jesus: "I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep." Rely on the strength of the shepherd.