

Homily. 4th Sunday of Easter. Year.B. 24/25 April 2021.

It's a very big thing for anyone to put themselves out front in defence of others, even risking their health and lives by doing so. It's such a big thing that no one in their right mind would willingly do so unless they sincerely cared for and loved those they were focused on defending and protecting. A life of service and self-sacrifice has no appeal at all for those who are only focused on themselves, their own comfort and doing whatever suits them. Of course, there are risks in any job or undertaking, but to willingly choose a path that is well known for being inherently risky takes both a special type of courage and a particular generosity of spirit.

Some of you know that my brother has been a Police Officer for several decades. I'm not going to regale you with horror stories, but suffice it to say he's seen and been in more than a few, to the point of having risked life and limb and suffered injury in carrying out of his work. I'm sure that much the same could be said of many working in the emergency services, other protective roles and the armed forces. Do these people do it for a living? Of course they do, but they know as well as you and I that there are easier and safer ways to earn their daily bread, ways that don't carry such a high quotient of risk. No, to stick at such professions means that the good order and safety of the community features highly in their personal values and ethos. These qualities are to be admired, and this so called 'every day heroism' ought to inspire in all of us gratitude and respect.

The same sacrificial spirit is what ANZAC Day calls to our minds each year. In our Aussie way we say that this sacrificial service is the basis and

true spirit of mateship, in battle going beyond just our own few mates, embracing all who need defending, helping and saving from peril, even as far as laying down one's life for the State, the Nation, for all of us.

Our Good Shepherd set Himself before us as a witness and an example of what it is like to serve and sacrifice one's own wishes for the wellbeing of others. Unlike the hired person, in the job only for their pay and benefits, He sticks to us, His flock, like glue through thick and thin. When the going gets tough, as it so often does, He doesn't run away. When the robbers, murderers, wreckers and wild ones come for our blood, He stands between us and all of them, freely laying down His own life to secure ours. He does this because He knows us and we, over time, have come to hear, understand and trust His voice. He does this because He loves us unconditionally, knowing that such love would be impossible, a madness even, if this life was all there was, but it not and He wants us to know this truth. When we come to see our lives as Jesus sees them, then His sacrificial way in some degree becomes our own way of life too.

The living, dying and rising of the Good Shepherd is all for our benefit. Through Him we get to taste the lavish love of God for us that goes beyond this present sliver of time into eternity, the eternity into which he is leading us, a renewed and risen life. It's His resurrection, and ours in Him, that makes our loving and sacrifices possible and meaningful, risking our all for each other as He does for us. This is the path He's guiding us on as we come to resemble Him, becoming good shepherds of God's abundant life and sacrificial love for all in today's world