

2019 4th SUNDAY OF EASTER

On Monday as I was strolling back to my house, having picked up the newspaper from the front gate, a fantail darted around my legs- not once but twice. I stopped and noticed that the tiny creature had landed on a shrub only a couple of metres away. It was looking me straight in the eye and chirping away vigorously. It obviously had something to say to me because its chirping just went on and on. And my heart yearned to know what it was saying.

A couple of days later I was lent the latest book written by Fr. Richard Rohr, who is one of my very favourite Catholic authors. In the opening pages he makes the point that the Divine Presence is in all of creation. God loves things by becoming them. In the opening verses of the Bible, in Genesis chapter 1, God is described as being the light inside of everything.

And so I began pondering on what God, within that beautiful fantail, was saying to me on Monday afternoon.

I think I received a clue on Wednesday. I was sitting at my desk in my study looking out onto the Campion College fields. Three very young students- all girls- came skipping along in front of my window, chattering away happily. Suddenly they bent down and picked up small bundles of leaves and tossed them high into the air- laughing all the time. Clearly they were celebrating autumn and its beauty. Clearly, too, they were celebrating youth and the joy of being alive. My heart leaped as I beheld their innocent embrace of God's Creation.

And so I think the fantail was saying to me- 'Look at me, Brother Frank- behold my beauty. See how wonderfully I reflect the artistry within God's creation. Rejoice in our Wonderful Creator- alive in me, in you and in all of creation.

Most certainly that is what those three young Campion girls were doing as they celebrated the wonder and beauty of autumn.

Jesus knew I needed these insights because I have had to accompany a number of people during the week who are burdened with intense sorrow. I have prayed over them and tried to give them hope. But it is impossible to not become somewhat depressed, somewhat gloomy, when people you care for deeply are suffering.

And this is where today's Gospel hit the mark for me.

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, came to me in the fantail and in the three young girls and reminded me to see the events of life with the eyes of Faith.

I was reminded by them that Jesus- the Good Shepherd- is walking alongside me as I journey through life. He is there with a steadying arm during the ups and downs of day to day life. He knows when I am in need of encouragement. He knows when my Faith is wobbly. And Good Shepherd that He is, He reaches out to me and gives me renewed courage.

The Good Shepherd is with us if we just open our hearts and reflect. It is so important that we see the hand of the Good Shepherd in our lives. Things which we might see as happy coincidences are frequently not random events at all. Rather they are acts of the Good Shepherd.

Let me give you a further example. On Tuesday as I was reading the latest 'New Zealand Catholic' I noticed an advertisement from the Pleroma Bookshop highlighting Fr. Richard Rohr's latest book 'The Universal Christ'; the one I have already referred to. I said to myself, 'I would like to read that book. I should send for it.' Of course I didn't! Next day, however, I went to visit someone at Beetham Village but they were not home. Just down the path was the home of John Egan. So I decided to pop in on him and Viv. I hadn't seen them for months. And there on a coffee table was that very same book. 'The Universal Christ'. John had just finished it and was only too happy to lend it to me. And now I am absorbed by it; enriched by it. That is the hand of the Good Shepherd!

And I'm sure every one of you will have similar stories because every one of you is cherished by the Good Shepherd Who delights in leading you to refreshing water and good pasture.

On this 'Good Shepherd Sunday' we pray especially for vocations to the priesthood. Our spiritual shepherds in 30 to 40 years' time are still youngsters in School. If they are to say 'Yes' to God's Call it will partly be because of our prayers

Let us pray to our Good Shepherd that He will give us an abundance of gentle and holy priests to guide His Beloved Flock in years to come.

We are asked today, also, to make a monetary donation to the Diocese to help pay for the education of our seminarians. It is something we are all asked to share in generously. Please respond to the flier which gives you clear directions on how best to make your donation. Thank-you.

