May 7, 2017
Fourth Sunday of Easter

Acts 2:14a, 36-41
1 Pt 2:20b-25
Jn 10:1-10

By Don Timmerman

Christ was called the Lamb of God, and His followers were called sheep. Christ was called a lamb because it was an animal often offered as a sacrifice to God. We know that Christ endured great pain in order to give us new life. He showed us an excellent example of what is expected of us, His followers, His sheep. Christ suffered much when His friends deserted him and He was beaten, whipped, disgraced and crucified as a common criminal. In spite of all this pain and suffering He acted nonviolently, forgiving and even praying for those who wronged him. In spite of the fact that He was treated like a criminal after He had done so many good things for others He did not wish evil on those who did evil to Him.

The leaders of his Jewish religion called Him a blasphemer, a heretic who falsely claimed to be the Messiah. The Messiah, in the minds of the Jews, was to be a mighty warrior who would come and save the Jewish people by slaughtering their enemies. Christ, however, the true Messiah, came as a lamb, not a wolf; as a compassionate and loving person, not a vicious warrior. He showed love to all, even His enemies. He did this in order to show us the way to a new life of happiness, in other words salvation. Christ showed the Jewish hierarchy and us that freedom and salvation comes from love, not lethal weapons.

Do we act as sheep or do we act as wolves? Do we wish our enemies good? Do we destroy evil with kindness and love? Do we always forgive? Do we endure evil or do we inflict it? Do we retaliate against those who trespass against us, or do we do good to them....like Christ? Do we believe in an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, or do we forgive seventy seven times seven times, meaning always?

Christ was called a fool then and is still seen that way now. Christians who act like sheep are called weak and cowardly for not wishing to kill those who kill. Our society believes it is Christian to avenge the innocent by killing the perpetrators. We do the opposite of what Christ the Lamb taught. We invade other countries if they do not do what we want. We destroy people’s homes, even kill them and their children. We act as wolves. Yet we are meant to be sheep, living in community with other sheep, namely all God’s people. We are meant to be peacemakers but we make war. If we opposed warfare as much as we do welfare, we would be Christians.

April is the month when we are asked to pay taxes. Do you know where your taxes go? Are you aware that over half of our taxes go toward war against those deemed by our government as “enemies”? Toward a military that cannot account for trillions of dollars it already was given by taxpayers, which cannot even be audited. Less than 1% of our taxes go to the hungry or homeless, those without water, savings, decent schools or healthcare or toilets. In the reading from Acts today it is written that the Christians were to share what they have in common, sell their possessions and distribute the proceeds to all who were in need. They were to show goodwill to all people.
Those who live in the Casa Maria Catholic Worker community in Milwaukee refuse to pay federal taxes because they feel that it is not Christian to give money for war, weapons, pollution and corruption. Instead, they give what they have to the neediest. Sometimes their wages are garnished; others choose to live below the poverty line so as not to have to pay federal taxes. They would rather live with very little than to support war and bloodshed – be sheep instead of wolves. They are trying to follow Christ’s example of sacrificing what we have to give life, not death, to the world. During this Lenten season, remember how we enter the gate into eternal happiness – by conquering hatred, war and poverty with love, not lethal weapons. In becoming sheep, we follow the example of the Lamb of God.

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