

4 Easter, A, 2008
St. John the Evangelist, Huntsville, AR

Last Christmas a friend gave me an HBO miniseries called "Band of Brothers." Perhaps you've seen it? It is about Easy Company, part of the 101st Airborne Division and their missions during World War II. If you don't know about Easy Company, their story is amazing and heroic. They were the company that was always sent into the teeth of the battle. Often they were the first to go in, and they went where the casualties would be the highest. But what was even more surprising is that they would even ask for the most challenging missions and take pride in their bravery and valor. Now, what made them so heroic and selfless? It was their company commander, Major Richard Winters. He was the model leader. In one scene he corrects one of his platoon commanders, who had played poker the night before with his men. He told him, "Never put yourself in a position to take advantage of these men." You see, it wasn't playing poker that was the problem, but rather, doing something that might be harmful to the men. The implication was clear: a good leader always looks out for his men; he never takes advantage of them. I once heard this insightful maxim: "people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." Major Richard Winters was a great leader because he truly cared about his men, and as a result, they would follow him into any battle.

Today's gospel is from John 10, where Jesus outlines the kind of leaders He is, that is, He is the Good Shepherd. But did you notice how similar Jesus' style of leadership is to

that of Major Winters? Listen to what Jesus says: "I am the good shepherd. The sheep hear my voice and they follow me. All who came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. A thief comes only to steal and slaughter and destroy; I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly." In other words, the Good Shepherd would never put himself in a position to take advantage of His sheep. Instead, He would lay down His life for His sheep, and so it's little wonder that the sheep follow Him and they do so gladly. There's an old proverb that goes: "anyone who thinks he's leading but doesn't have any followers is only taking a walk." You know, there are 1.2 billion Catholics and millions of Christians all over the world today who follow Jesus because we know that He's not a thief and robber, He's the Good Shepherd who leads us to abundant life.

Let me give you an example of what happens when a leader thinks only of himself rather than his followers: there are devastating consequences. There was a young Jewish boy who grew up in Germany many years ago. He greatly admired his father, who made sure the family's life revolved around their religious practices. The father led them to synagogue faithfully. In his teens, the boy's family moved to another town in Germany, where there was only a Lutheran church. Suddenly, one day the father announced that the family would abandon their Jewish roots and join the Lutheran church. When the stunned family asked why, the father replied that it would be good for his business. As you

might imagine, the young man was confused and saddened. Later, he went to study in England and his sadness turned into resentment, and later into anger. He spent his days in the British museum and put his ideas into a book, where he called all religious the "opiate of the masses." The name of this young man was Karl Marx, the founder of the Communist movement. You see, Marx's father, in a sense, was a thief and a robber, according to Jesus' definition, and his selfishness turned his son into one, too.

As you know, this past week Pope Benedict XVI named Fr. Anthony Taylor as our new bishop. I'm going to have to ask why he misspells his name with an "h." Last Thursday I listened to his news conference and I was very pleased to hear him say that he has come to serve everyone, especially the humble, the poor and the immigrants. God has sent us a truly "good shepherd" who will care for his sheep. Today ask yourself: what kind of leader am I (because we all are)? You may not be a major in the army or a bishop in a diocese, but we all influence and lead others: as mothers and fathers at home, as priests in parishes, as managers in business, as football players or cheerleaders. We all have people who look up to us and admire us. The question is: do people look at us like Easy Company looked at Major Winters or like Karl Marx thought about his father? Through our example, may we lead others to Jesus Christ, who alone can give us life and that life abundantly.

Praised be Jesus Christ!