April 17, 2016

My understanding of sheep is rather limited. As a kid, I spent a summer at my aunt and uncle’s farm in Iowa helping my cousin Tess with her sheep. She had three to prepare and show at the country fair through her 4-H group. My contribution, to say the least, was minimal. I remember after a particularly difficult day my uncle, a man of very few words, telling us, “Sheep are hard ‘cause they aren’t smart; not like hogs.” End of speech.

The Good Shepherd understands the sheep. He knows that we have a rare genius for finding trouble. This often follows from our utter confidence that we think we know what is best. The whole of salvation history could be seen as the story of the flock that wanders off into trouble, and the Shepherd who seeks them out.

Our sensitive egos may not like to admit it, but the sheep metaphor is spot-on. Whether the perspective is that of individuals, the Church, or the entire human race it rings true. We miss the point, however, if the focus is on the sheep rather than the shepherd. It is Christ the Good Shepherd who matters. It is He who knows us and calls us. It is He whom we follow. Our desire is not to be smart, but to be faithful.

Fr. Dan White, S.J.