# Being Shepherds in Everyday Life

In 1991, Albert Brooks starred in “Defending Your Life.” It was a comedy about a man who dies, and finds out he has lived many lives only to be sent back again and again with nothing to show for it each time he comes back to be judged at the Pearly Gates, for he is too fearful to make bold decisions. Finally though he figures it out on one last attempt, summoning the courage to be forever with the woman he has fallen in love with as he is about to be sent back to earth, jumping off the train and putting himself in danger to get to the train where Julia (Meryl Streep) is heading to heaven.

It’s not a bad movie, but needless to say I don’t think that’s how judgment or getting to heaven will really work. That said, one of the things we are all called to do is to find our way to heaven.

The problem? Like in the movie, when Daniel (Brooks’ character) is “on trial” and shown over and over again his bad choices, we do the same things as humans. I’ve never done anything too crazy, but if I could talk to myself at 15 or 20 years of age again, (or even at times far more recently!) I’d say hey don’t do that. (For instance, after being at Saint Joseph’s for a month, I heard a rare bird, a prairie warbler, was in a field in Dakota County. I had to see it, only to get up super early, go to the field at 6 a.m., get lost in the field, and a kind person gave me a ride back to my car. Yes, I am that crazy of a bird photographer. Of course when I got there I could not find the bird, but did end up seeing one a couple of years later - in the Florida Everglades where they are in winter).

This is where shepherds are so important. We need them in our lives, and we need to be them too.

This weekend, we honor our mothers. And as I think of my journey through life with my mom, I think of her skills as an artist. She is pretty humble about it, but she loved to paint as a teenager, and then took it up again when she became an empty nester. Above the fireplace at the rectory is one of her recent paintings of a waterfalls I photographed near Mankato. And in the basement is a country landscape she painted before I came along in about 1975. (The stork dropped me off in 1977). I treasure both, because they remind me of her presence in my life in that she will always be there on my journey. But at a deeper level, through how she has lived her life, she has also painted a picture for me of how one goes to heaven. She’s been patient as a shepherd with me growing up as I went through different phases. Believe it or not, there was even a point when I questioned my Catholic faith, and the truth of the Church - I was in high school, and very much Christian but not sure if the Catholic Church held the “truth” as I met people from other faiths for the first time in a public school. (Needless to say I got there of course, and I think my faith is now stronger for it). She is an incredible role model with her charity and all she does for our family, from how she helped me learn so much but also of the deeper lessons of how we live out the faith in action. She has been along with my dad such a shepherd in my life helping me to be guided along, and taught me how I can do this as I live out my vocation as a shepherd.

This is something we all share in. Life isn't meant to coast along or to play it safe - we need to be bold in how we live out the faith in word and action, not fearing to speak to what we believe in, taking our faith seriously in how we journey with God and teach others through things like going to Mass, and caring for others. This brings to mind confirmation, which we also just celebrated this past week too at the Cathedral. Kyle Finken who is our Director of Faith Formation, has worked so hard along with catechists in helping our newly confirmed along, working of course with their parents and sponsors. But now having celebrated confirmation, my hope is that they - and all of us who are baptized and confirmed - never forget that we need to be a shepherd for one another in this world. In a society that so often is about relativism - meaning do what you want, there are no objective truths - we need to be different and unafraid. We need to seek out those who are lost or hurting. We need to not give up on those who are angry with the Church or who have stopped going to Mass. We need to be present when we see people in spiritual or material need. There are so many things we can do to be a shepherd - the problem is we can be fearful to "rock the boat" or get involved, or just so caught up in our daily lives and hobbies we are blind to the needs all around us.

I'm sure like me you have many a mom story too for they do so much for us all. To all of our moms thank you for all you do. May we strive to be true shepherds like them as we help one another find the way to heaven.

Have a blessed week,

Fr. Paul