

Do you know who you are?

The trouble with getting so old lies in part to my referring to things out of the past that few people today even remember – and often in a setting that's technologically laughable to people forty years old or younger: I mean typewriters, mimeograph machines, stencils and ink, telephone booths, biplanes made of fabric, lawn mowers that required pushing to make the blades spin . . . DC 3 passenger planes that seated 25 people (?) and took four hours to fly from the District of Columbia to Evansville, Indiana . . .

The same goes for old movies – although Turner Classic Movies does make classics and even B films current for today's audiences – if they watch them. The same may not be true of M.A.S.H – the TV serial that still perpetuates the Korean War; and therefore of Alan Alda – which should allow me to mention a chance encounter I had with him in 1978.

A colleague of mine, Bob Riesett, and I were conducting a workshop in a downtown Baltimore hotel that year. We didn't know that Alda was in town playing a part in the movie *The Seduction of Joe Tynan*. We were waiting for an elevator to open and when it did who stood there solitary but the actor himself – and my colleague (an extrovert of sorts) proclaimed: *Do you know who you are? You're Alan Alda!* Alda smiled sheepishly and exited and that was that.

But Riesett raised a good question. *Do you know who you are?* Did Alan Alda really know who he was beyond his biographical record, film career, the many characters he played since God knows when? Which turns the camera on you. Do you know who you are? Or are you forced by demands and circumstance to skate upon the thin ice of your days – no time for the deeper questions that might sort you out from the many roles or characters you play from day to day, year to year. Sure, you come to church – but for an hour a week and how much of your mind do you bring with you? I said that Alan Alda smiled *sheepishly* at Riesett's unexpected question: *Do you know who you are?* Which could be accentuated: *Do you know who you ARE?* Have you decided NOT to be instead of to BE. Are you a unique being from which, from whom even you hide? Is there somebody there you have yet to meet?

In today's first reading the prophet Jeremiah speaks of the leaders of Israel as shepherds and its people as sheep poorly shepherded. But nowadays people don't like to be compared to sheep, to behave as a flock being led here and there, hounded by watchdogs. They don't like the thought of being fleeced, just one of the crowd, aimless, vulnerable as being led to some kind of slaughter – sacrificial victims (not since the Holocaust!). In today's Gospel Jesus himself is moved with pity for such a sheepish humanity – and yes he does wish they had a shepherd.

But does that mean he wants us to continue to behave like sheep? I think he wants us to advance from being sheep to becoming shepherds ourselves . . . fully awake human beings who know how to guide our world toward true society, not just a conglomeration of isolated lookalikes but spiritually mature human beings, made in the

image of God, Christ-like in our awareness of our worth and of the worth of others (even if we don't quite see it yet), caring in the manner of God, appreciative of *all things bright and beautiful*. In other words, being who you really ARE, what you really ARE, a luminous being, a Human Being.