

On Racks of Lamb, a Nice MLT, and Good Shepherd Sunday

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If I ever ate lamb growing up, I don't remember it. I reached out to my sister last week to ask about her memories on the subject. She has no recall of lamb either. She recalls Mom's liver and onions — which I ate only once back then, and which I have refused to eat ever since — but lamb escapes us both. Such was my (non) exposure to lamb for a long, long time.

Until a number of years ago, when a runner friend invited me and the other runners in our group to his home for dinner. My wife joined me, and we learned when we arrived that my friend's personal chef was serving up lamb as the main meal. I was looking forward to the experience, but the menu concerned Gail, who explained that when her mom had served it a few times when Gail was small, she didn't like it.

To Gail's delight, the lamb that night was delicious. It's hard to describe how things taste, but I can tell you that it did *not* taste like chicken. It was maybe a little sweet. I found a site online that describes the flavor of lamb as "pastoral," whatever that means. Gail told me later that perhaps she didn't like her mom's lamb offering because her mom was serving up mutton instead. Could be.

But Miracle Max was certainly not one to turn his nose up at mutton. If it was well-prepared, at least. In *The Princess Bride*, the disgruntled miracle man tells Inigo Montoya that he ranks a good piece of mutton (in combination with bread, lettuce, and tomatoes) ahead of even True Love in the cosmic scheme. Yeah. "True Love is the greatest thing in the world," Max says, "except for a nice MLT, mutton, lettuce, and tomato sandwich, when the mutton is nice and lean..."

I haven't priced lean mutton recently, but lamb? Lamb is *crazy* expensive. I know this because a few weeks before Easter, my wife told me she wanted to serve ham *and* lamb come the Great Sunday. "Just a taste..." she said. I told her I'd buy some little lamb thing when I bought the ham. Now listen to this: I got a 10-lb spiral-sliced ham for \$9 & change; I got a **1.29-lb** rack of lamb for **\$22** & change. Yikes.

And I suppose all of this comes to mind now because the Church traditionally tags the Fourth Sunday of Easter as *Good Shepherd Sunday* with Gospel readings each year from John:10 (entitled in my Book, "The Good Shepherd"). Yes, Jesus plays the title role. He says so himself: "I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep..." He even repeats himself and then makes it more personal: "I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me...and I will lay down my life for the sheep."

But Jesus is also part of the flock, and priests everywhere point this out to us at every Mass we attend: "Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb." Jesus — the Good Shepherd — is also the Paschal Lamb. The supper **of** the Lamb, then, **is** the Lamb. I'm a long-time fan of Miracle Max, so he can have all the mutton he wants. Even the nice-and-lean stuff. When I step forward to consume the Lamb, I have another meal in mind. Something sweet, pastoral, eternal.