

4th Sunday of Easter: Jesus, the Good Shepherd

Acts 13:14,43-42; Psalm 100:1-2,3,5; Revelation 7:9,14b-17; John 10:27-30

One of the most beautiful and profound descriptions of Jesus is being a Good Shepherd. He loves, leads, and lays down his life for his sheep! Without a doubt, the quality of a shepherd can be likened to our mothers. Our patron, St. Theresa of the Child Jesus, said, "the loveliest masterpiece of the heart of God is the heart of a mother. We can approximate the heart of mothers with the Good Shepherd's heart.

Did you know that a shepherd was one of the lowest jobs during the time of Jesus? The shepherds were often being looked down and labeled as lower class. Because of the nature of their job, they are away from their families for a long time to bring the sheep to distant areas for pasture and sometimes have to endure harsh weather conditions. It's part of their job to find a secure place to keep the sheep together and protect them from predators. Typically, they wore ragged clothes, smelled like sheep, and stunk.

Having said this, Jesus as the Good Shepherd lowered himself and assumed his role as a shepherd to be intimately united with us, his sheep. It is a relationship founded on his love and obedience to the Father. "My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one can take them out of the Father's hand. The Father and I are one" (John 10:29-30). The foundation of Jesus' union with the sheep is the mutual self-giving love between him and the Father. The Father gives the sheep to the Son, and in obedience, the Son cares for all given him and freely gives back to the Father. This mutual self-giving and the unbreakable union spill over into Jesus' relationship with the sheep. His bond with the sheep is everlasting. Such bond provides power to the Apostles, Paul, and Barnabas, so that they could do good and speak boldly the gospel message (cf. Acts 13:46-47). It strengthens the followers in times of trials and leads them to stand before God's throne (cf. Rev. 7:9,14-17). The bond leads us to heights that we would not imagine reaching by our efforts alone.

But the Good Shepherd expects the sheep to listen to his voice. "My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27). Listening leads the sheep to the right pasture for the words of the Good Shepherd nourish, strengthen and guide them, while it prevents the sheep from getting lost and being deceived by the other voices. It guarantees us that if we listen to the voice of our shepherd, we will not be lost, and failure to listen may endanger our lives to deceiving voices and false shepherds. His words are our guide and pasture. Therefore, constancy in prayer and reading the bible help us to be familiar with the Good Shepherd's voice. These are like batteries that charge our soul and divine compasses that order our day. However, our Lord does not only expects us to listen to his voice; he wants us to receive his soul and divinity through the Holy Eucharist. As Pope Gregory said: "The Lord laid down his life for his sheep that he might convert his Body and Blood in our sacraments and satisfy the sheep whom he had redeemed with the nourishment of his own flesh."

We can never repay the Good Shepherd's self-giving love to us equally, nor return in the same fashion what he did to us, but we receive it with an open and grateful heart and pay it forward!

About more than a year ago, there was an incident that some of you may have already known but let me repeat in telling the story for it is worth pondering the lesson of shepherding. One of the kindergarten children of St. Theresa School, Thomasine Aceves, did her humble way of responding to the uncertainties that many of us experienced during the intense moment of the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic. Little Thomasine, whose school routine was sadly altered by the pandemic, did something to connect herself with the school and her classmates with the help of her family. She helped out in making facemasks to give to her classmates and teachers. It's a simple act of being a shepherd for others, an opportunity of sharing small acts of love like St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus. Thomasine's parents delivered the facemasks to the school, hung the package on the doorknob, and left the box outside the door, but sadly, they were all stolen. Although the facemasks were gone, her act of kindness remains. In the eyes of God, the stolen facemasks have the markings of the kindness of this little one.

Let us all be a shepherd, think like a shepherd, and act as a good shepherds according to the heart of Jesus. Let us not allow the day to pass without checking in with the voice of our Good Shepherd.

Praise God for giving us mothers.. May God bestow upon them his choicest blessings!

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