

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Introduction

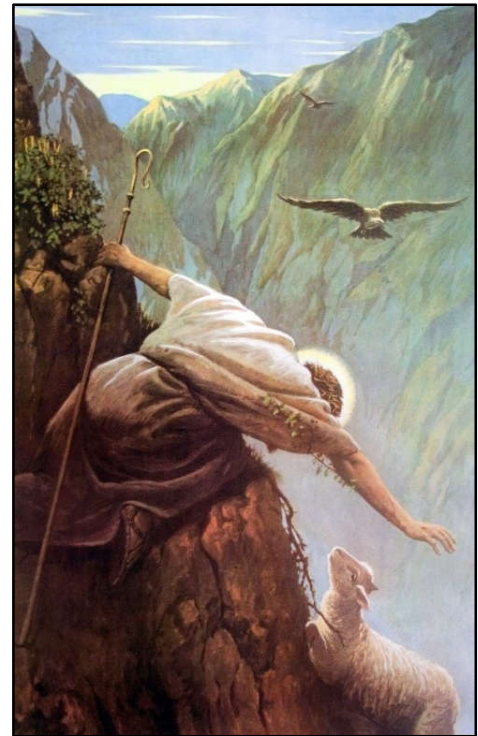
Dear sisters and brothers, today we celebrate what is popularly known as Good Shepherd Sunday. As we celebrate this Eucharist, let us pray that we truly attach ourselves to Jesus, our Good Shepherd. He is the one who leads us to fresh, green pastures. He is the one who lays down his life for his sheep. Let us pray that being attached to him, we experience nourishment, guidance, health and healing from the Good Shepherd.

Homily

My dear sisters and brothers, when we think of the Good Shepherd, most of us are accustomed to seeing images of the shepherd that are mild, peaceful and “safe”. I happened to come across a very interesting image that depicts the Good Shepherd in a different way. It’s a little too small for all of you to see, but I will describe it briefly to you.

This image shows the Shepherd and a lost sheep. The sheep is perched precariously on a steep slope. The surrounding landscape is of a mountainous area. The sheep has probably slipped and is stranded a little way down from the top of a mountain.

We see the Good Shepherd who holds on to a rock on the side of the mountain with one hand, and is trying to get hold of the sheep with the other hand. The sheep is definitely in danger, but in trying to save it, the shepherd has put himself in danger as well. He has climbed down that precarious slope, and with one foot on a rock, he is reaching over with an outstretched arm to catch hold of the lost sheep. This is an image of a shepherd who risks his life to rescue his sheep.



This depiction comes across very beautifully in the Second Reading of today, taken from the Book of Apocalypse, or the Book of Revelation, which is the last book in the Bible. It is a book that describes the Shepherd in a symbolic way. This description is very interesting. It speaks about a vision where there is a great multitude. The composition of this multitude is also interesting – they are not a select few who are part of the sheepfold. This is a multitude so large that it cannot be counted. It is the multitude of sheep, or people—us—who are of every nation, tribe and language, all standing before the throne of God. A very interesting imagery to tell us that God’s flock is not composed of like-minded people – people who are familiar with each other. God’s flock is immense and diverse.

One would ask: What about people of other faiths? Would Jesus, the Good Shepherd, die for them as well? It is implied that this Good Shepherd is ready to die for this multitude of people of different nations and probably different religions. He is not dying for a select few; his death and resurrection is for all. This is very consoling news. When we work with people of other faiths, we may wonder if they are all going to be

condemned because they do not believe in Christ. This reading seems to suggest another way of looking at the multitude.

We also see in this description that the people who belong to this great sheepfold have come out of a great tribulation, a great ordeal, a great suffering. They are not just “good people” who are always around and do not move beyond the safety of the pasture, but they are people who have come out of suffering and pain. They are broken. And they are called to the sheepfold. None of us who sit here are perfect. We have sinned, we are broken, we are wounded, and we are also called by the Good Shepherd.

What happens when we are called? The reading says that their robes, which are soiled because of sin, suffering and brokenness, will be washed clean, not in some pristine water, but by the blood of the Lamb. This implies that the Lamb had to shed its blood in order to wash us and make us whole again. And this is what our Good Shepherd has done. He died on the cross to wash us clean so that we may belong to his sheepfold.

What more does the Shepherd do? He sets up a tent in which all the multitude will be housed – a tent symbolising protection against the winds, the cold and the scorching sun. The Good Shepherd takes us all into his tent. And that tent is large enough, as it is said in the reading, because it is spread over all the people. It is not just a small church, but a huge tent that can house all people coming from every corner of the earth. And they will experience no more hunger, no more thirst, and their tears will be wiped away. The reading says that they have come to the throne of the Shepherd, who is the Lamb that is seated on the throne. By his death and resurrection, the Lamb himself becomes the Shepherd for each of us and all of us. The Good Shepherd protects us, heals us, and gives us strength and consolation. We belong to him, and nobody can snatch us away from him.

Let us pray with gratitude to God. He is a unique shepherd – not a comfortable shepherd, but a shepherd that perches himself at the edge of the mountain and risks his life to save us. All other shepherds are meant to lead people, not to themselves—they may not be good shepherds—but to Jesus, the Good Shepherd, Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Let us pray to our heavenly Father, thanking him for the gift of Jesus, our Good Shepherd. Our Father...



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