

WORD FROM THE PASTOR

JESUS IS OUR GOOD SHEPHERD AND OUR SAFE ZONE



My brothers and sisters in Christ, Every year in the heart of the Easter Season, we celebrate the Good Shepherd, Psalm 22 "The Lord is my shepherd" and to Chapter 10 of the Gospel of John, which speaks of "shepherds," "sheep," "sheepfolds," and "pastures." Our lives are often strewn with difficult moments with trials and sufferings whose reasons elude us. Our lives are, quite often, monotonous; one day simply mirrors the next. Yet they are also, just as often, vibrant, joyful, and fruitful! But to perceive all of this, we must have the courage to look at ourselves exactly as we are to turn inward and allow ourselves to be challenged. And, quite often, we may be afraid to see ourselves as we truly are. We may hide behind our personal narratives whether painful or joyful so as to leave no room for life itself. "I have no need for others," some might say... "I have

no need of God," others might claim. And so, we drift into an existence that is capricious and devoid of meaning even though what is unfolding in the early morning of Easter what we have just heard in the readings, and what was experienced by Mary Magdalene and Jesus' disciples is precisely what gave meaning to *their* lives! Let us make no mistake: their lives, too, were marked by difficult moments and trials, by monotony and meaninglessness until they encountered Someone who chose to look upon them with a gaze filled with goodness and promise. Someone who demonstrated that He was willing to give them indeed His very own life. Here, indeed, we encounter **a pivotal image embraced by Jesus Himself ("I am the Good Shepherd,"** This truth is so vital that, on this day, we pray for vocations. Believing in God as Shepherd, confessing Jesus as the Good Shepherd, and praying for vocations within the Church.

We are invited to reflect upon these three distinct levels. Presence, consolation, strength received, a sense of purpose made clear this is how the Lord leads us. Psalm 22 also portrays God as **the One who "prepares a table before me."** To be God's guest this is, in essence, the true meaning of our Eucharistic celebrations and of every experience of prayer. God invites us; He goes ahead of us... and what if our greatest spiritual challenge lies in simply allowing ourselves to be welcomed humbly, simply, having nothing else to offer but our very selves? This also constitutes a communal experience. **To believe in God as Shepherd is to believe that we are not solitary figures, but rather a roped party of climbers at times carried, at times carrying others; at times supported, at times supporting one another!** To be part of the flock is not a matter of mere herd mentality, but rather a humble consent to journey forward alongside others.

To believe in the Good Shepherd is to confess the victory of Easter embracing the paradox that life is stronger than death. Let us note two specific attitudes highlighted in our Gospel reading that define our relationship with the Good Shepherd: **listening and passing through.** The Church acting simultaneously as the sheepfold, the flock, and the shepherdess fully embraces this pastoral imagery as its own. There is but one Shepherd Christ, yet we are all called to play the role of the **pastor**: the one who helps others crossover.

And so, if today you are searching for meaning in your life, I can tell you without fear of being mistaken that Christ is the only answer! There is no other. For He is the only one who can give us true life. I do not know exactly what you have come here to do today. But I hope that you will not leave the way you arrived. For Christ, our Hope, has risen! And He desires to dispel the darkness that prevents us from living the darkness that prevents us from entering life! He is our Good Shepherd.

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