

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, May 7th 2017

Today is Good Shepherd Sunday where we are invited to look at Jesus as that honorable shepherd who watches over and cares for his sheep. The job of being a shepherd is an extremely difficult one to say the least. I imagine that a job description would put most of us off and we would look elsewhere for employment. A shepherd literally laid down his life for his sheep by caring for them 24-7 as they say.

I can only imagine the difficulties of being shepherd. He travelled with the sheep as he sought fertile fields for their food; he led them to those pastures and watched over them as they were nourished. At night a new demand was put on the shepherd and his flock. They were to find a place safe for sleeping.

And, thus, the images of today's gospel: the gate of an enclosure prepared for rest/relaxation. But even here the shepherd couldn't just sleep and forget the world. He needed to be attentive to the sheep even (and maybe especially) at this vulnerable time of rest. Jesus warns in the parable that thieves can find entrance to the enclosure and steal the sheep. The shepherd needed vigilance as well as sleep for the upcoming day.

As the sheep entered the gate the shepherd stood in the middle and examined each animal for any wound or difficulty they might have encountered during the day. When they were all inspected the shepherd would lie across the gate to sleep; he did this to block any of the flock who might get lost by wandering around outside the enclosure.

Also, no one could come in from the outside without alerting the shepherd still on duty with his sheep! "Amen, Amen I say to you, I am the gate for the sheep. I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved and will come in and go out and find pasture."

Jesus identifies with both the Good Shepherd and the gate in today's gospel. As good shepherd he watches over us constantly. He keeps us nourished and safe from what may harm us and he is the gate we pass through while he continues to care for us at each moment.

This is what he is sent to do by the heavenly Father. Jesus is meant to be the very embodiment of God's loving care for each and all of us. Yes, we are sheep (the metaphor may bug us at times!) and the message here is to continue to watch for and receive God's merciful love, goodness and care. God is constantly on our side; the Good Shepherd is never on vacation, but always there for you and me just as the shepherd in today's gospel is there pouring himself out for his sheep.

As God's beloved we inherit the gracious goodness we are offered. Let us be vigilant to discover it and to be impelled to pass it on to others who call out to us to share that abundant mercy and forgiveness as the shepherd spent his love and care for those entrusted to him.

Thank you, Jesus, our Good shepherd.

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