

Chrism Day of Prayer 07

“THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD” - Psalm 23

Timmy and Mrs. Goodnest

A mom was concerned about her kindergarten son Timmy walking to school. He didn't want his mother to walk with him.

She wanted to give him the feeling that he had some independence but yet know that he was safe So she had an idea of how to handle it.

She asked a neighbour, Mrs. Goodnest, if she would please follow him to school in the mornings, staying at a distance, so he probably wouldn't notice her. Mrs. Goodnest said that since she was up early with her toddler anyway, it would be a good way for them to get some exercise as well, so she agreed.

The next school day, Mrs. Goodnest and her little girl, Marcy, set out following behind Timmy as he walked to school with another neighbour boy he knew.

She did this for the whole week. As the boys walked and chatted, kicking stones and twigs, Timmy's little friend noticed the same lady was following them as she seemed to do every day all week.

Finally he said to Timmy, "Have you noticed that lady following us to school all week? Do you know her?"

Timmy nonchalantly replied, "Yeah, I know who she is." The friend said, "Well, who is she?"

"That's just Shirley Goodnest," Timmy replied, "and her daughter Marcy." "Shirley Goodnest? Who the heck is she and why is she following us?"

"Well", Timmy explained, "every night my Mom makes me say the 23rd Psalm with my prayers, 'cuz she worries about me so much. And in the Psalm, it says "Shirley Goodnest and Marcy shall follow me all the days of my life, **so I guess I'll just have to get used to it!**"

PDV 21.

By sacramental consecration the priest is configured to Jesus Christ as head and shepherd of the Church, and he is endowed with a "spiritual power" which is a share in the authority with which Jesus Christ guides the Church through his Spirit.(45)

By virtue of this consecration brought about by the outpouring of the Spirit in the sacrament of holy orders, the spiritual life of the priest is marked, moulded and characterized by the way of thinking and acting proper to Jesus Christ, head and shepherd of the Church, and which are summed up in his pastoral charity.

The figure of Jesus Christ as shepherd of the Church, his flock, takes up and represents in new and more evocative terms the same content as that of Jesus Christ as head and servant. Fulfilling the prophetic proclamation of the Messiah and Savior joyfully announced by the psalmist:

Psalm 23 -

To think that God in Christ is deeply concerned about me as a particular person gives great

purpose and enormous meaning to my short sojourn on this plant - as my shepherd, he is my owner, my manager - "I belong to him"

In much the same way that a cattle rancher has his brand to mark his cattle, each shepherd has his own distinctive ear mark which is cut into one or other of the ears of his sheep - a life long indelible mark of ownership that could never be erased (our theology of baptism, confirmation, priesthood). In addition, we also bear the mark of the cross: ***"If any one would be my disciples, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."***

Search our own hearts, motives, and personal relationship with Him

Do I really belong to him?

Do I really recognize his right to me?

Do I respond to his authority and acknowledge his ownership?

Do I Find freedom and complete fulfilment in this arrangement?

Do I sense a purpose and deep contentment because I am under his direction?

Do I know rest and repose, besides a definite sense of exciting adventure, in belonging to him?

"I shall not want" ("There is nothing I lack")

Main concept is that of not lacking - not deficient - in proper care of husbandry; but there is also a second emphasis in the idea of being utterly contented in his care and not craving or desiring anything more.

Why? Because no trouble is too great as He cares for his flock. He is the rancher who is outstanding because of his fondness for his sheep - who loves them for their own sakes as well as his personal pleasure in them.

He will, if necessary, be on the job 24/7

Desires to see his sheep contented, well-fed, safe and flourishing under his care. This indeed is his very life. He gives all he has to it.

He will go to no end of trouble to supply them with the finest grazing, the richest pasturage, ample winter feed, clean water, shelter from storms, protection from ruthless enemies and diseases and parasites to which sheep are so susceptible.

He sleep as it were with one eye and both ears open ready for the slightest sign of trouble.

"I have come that you might have life and have it more abundantly."

"In grassy meadows he lets me lie." ("In green pastures you let me graze")

Four requirements have to be met:

— -Owing to their timidity they refuse to lie down unless they are free of fear

Sheep are so timid and easily panicked that even a stray jackrabbit suddenly bounded from behind a bush can stampede a whole flock

Only need the slightest suspicion of danger from dogs, coyotes, cougars, bears, etc. To flee for their lives

The presence of their master and owner puts them at rest as nothing else can

We too live a most uncertain life, full of hazards, the unknown, the unexpected can produce great panic. There is nothing like Christ's presence to dispel the fear, panic, and terror of the unknown.

The former archbishop of San. Francisco, John Quinn, tells the story about the arrival of Mother Teresa and her Missionaries of Charity to open their house in the city. Poor Archbishop Quinn had gone to great efforts to make sure their convent was, while hardly opulent, quite comfortable. He recalls how Mother Teresa arrived and immediately ordered the carpets removed, the telephones, except for one, pulled out of the wall, the beds, except for the mattresses, taken away, and on and on. Explained Mother Teresa to the baffled archbishop, "All we really need in our convent is the tabernacle."

The importance of presence.

- -Free from friction with others of their kind; tension, rivalry and competition within the flock itself

There is a "butting order" - an old ewe will maintain her position by butting and driving others away from the best grazing ground or favourite bed grounds

This continuous conflict and jealousy within the flock can be a most detrimental thing. The sheep become edgy, tense, discontented and restless. They lose weight and become irritable.

Less aggressive sheep are often far more contented, quiet and restful.

Of course, when our eyes are on the master, they are not on those around us

Good to reflect on living and working with a fellow priest in this context. A unique opportunity to teach the faithful by example that it is possible to "love one another".

"Last would be first and the first last" - any shepherd has great compassion for the poor, weak sheep that get butted about by the domineering ones.

I remember watching my first pastor, Msgr. Muga: a real extrovert, the life of the party - singing Irish songs, amateur magician. At a parish dinner party for parishioners, he will spend the most time with the one there who has fallen away from the Church; first communion calls - old Longfellow Street - poor and the housebound person - really make them feel good because the Msgr. brought them communion, not just one of the priests! Invited to all twenty parties after First Communion, he would make sure he attends the one of the child who has no father.

- -Only when free of flies or parasites can they relax; sheep especially in the summer, can be driven to absolute distraction by all kinds of flies and ticks.

When tormented by these pests it is literally impossible for them to lie down and rest. Instead they are up on their feet, stamping their legs, shaking their heads, ready to rush off into the bush for relief from the pest.

Repellants and dipping to clear their fleeces of ticks, shelter belts of trees and bush available.

We too know what it's like to be bugged.- all the irritations and annoyances that we met in life and ministry. Fruits of the Holy Spirit

- -Must be free from hunger

Sheep countries tend to be dry semi-arid areas. Green pastures are the results of clearing rough, rocky land; of tearing out brush and roots and stumps; of deep plowing and careful soil preparation; of seeding and planting; of irrigating; etc. - all of which require tremendous toil and skill and time.

When lambs are maturing and ewes need green succulent feed for heavy milk flow there is no substitute for good pasturage.

On such forage, it is possible for lambs to reach 100 pounds in weight within 100 days from birth. The secret to this is that the flock can fill up quickly, then lie down quietly to rest and ruminate. A hungry sheep is ever on its feet.

The Cure of Ars said: *"All the good works in the world are not equal to the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, because they are the works of men, but the Mass is the work of God. Even martyrdom is nothing in comparison, for it is but the sacrifice of man to God, but the Mass is the sacrifice of God for man."*

To be free from hunger it is also important to celebrate not only for the people but to pray the mass for oneself.

Only the shepherd can provide release from these anxieties. It all depends upon his diligence.

"By tranquil streams he leads me" ("To safe water you lead me")

The shepherd knows where the best drinking places are - he, with much effort and industry, provides the watering places.

On average the body of a sheep is composed of about 70% water, needed to maintain body normal metabolism. Without the sheep becomes dehydrated, weak and impoverished.

If not led, they will often end up drinking from the polluted pot holes where they pick up internal parasites.

Generally speaking, water for sheep came from three main sources: dew on the grass (sheep by habit rise just before dawn and start to feed), deep wells (has to be drawn or bailed by the owner), or springs and streams.

Our “water” - the sacraments and the Liturgy of the Hours; spiritual reading and lectio divine; and personal prayer.

“To restore my spirit” (“You restore my strength”)

We are all acquainted with the bitterness of feeling helpless and without strength.

“A cast sheep” or a “cast down sheep” is a shepherd’s term for a sheep that has turned over on its back and cannot get up again by itself.

Such a sheep is a very pathetic sight. Lying on its back, its feet in the air, it flays away frantically struggling to stand up, without success. Sometimes it will bleat a little for help but generally it lies there lashing about in a frightened frustration.

Important to look over the sheep every day and count them to see that all are up and on their feet. It is not only the shepherd who keeps a shape eye for cast sheep, but also predators - as a cast sheep is an easy prey and death is not far off.

Even the largest, fattest, strongest and healthiest sheep can become cast and a casualty - centre of gravity shifts, panic and a frantic struggle ensues, frequently making the situation even worse. As it lies there struggling, gases begin to build up in the rumen. As these expand they tend to retard and cut off blood circulation to the extremities of the body, especially the legs and the sheep can die within a few hours.

Why does this happen? Sometimes, looking for a soft spot or rounded hollow, it get trapped. The easy place, the cozy corner, the comfortable position where there is no hardship, no need for endurance, no demand for self-sacrifice.

Or it might have too much wool. Often when the fleece becomes very long, and matted with mud, manure, burrs and other debris, it is much easier for a sheep to become cast, literally weighed down with its own wool. Clinging accumulation of things, of possessions, of worldly ideas, begin to weigh me.

It is significant that no high priest was ever allowed to wear wool when he entered the Holy of Holies. This spoke of pride, of self, of personal preference, and God could not tolerate it.

The third cause of a cast sheep is simply that they are too fat. No longer agile and nimble on their feet.

‘He guides me in paths of saving justice as befits his name.’ (“You guide me along the right path for the sake of your name.”)

Sheep are notorious creatures of habit. If left to themselves they will follow the same trails until they become ruts; graze on the same hills until they turn to desert wastes; pollute their own ground until it is corrupt with disease and parasites. Many of the world’s finest sheep ranges have been ruined beyond repair by overgrazing, poor management and indifferent or ignorant sheep owners.

No other class of livestock requires more careful handling, more detailed direction, than do sheep.

Sheep gnaw the grass to the very ground until even the roots are damaged. Secret is to keep them on the move. There must be a predetermined plan of action, a deliberate, planned rotation from one grazing ground to another in line with right and sound principles of management.

Role of the parish pastoral plan - we mustn’t remain content with maintenance ministry. Where do we as a parish want to be in five years?

Whenever a shepherd open a gate into a fresh pasture the sheep are filled with excitement - kick up their heels and leap with delight at the prospects of finding fresh feed.

Our own behaviour patterns and life habits are so much like that of sheep it is a bit embarrassing. We are a stiff-necked and stubborn lot. We prefer to follow our own fancies and turn to our own ways. ***“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own ways”*** (Is.53:6). And this we do deliberately, repeatedly even to our own disadvantage. There is something almost terrifying about the destructive self-determination of a human being. It is inexorably interlocked with personal pride and self-assertion. We insist that we know what is best for us even though the disastrous results may be self-evident.

Just as sheep will blindly, habitually, stupidly follow one another along the same little trails until they become ruts that erode into giant gullies, so we cling to the same habits that we have seen ruin other lives.

“Even were I to walk in a ravine as dark as death, I should fear no danger, for you are at my side.” (“Even when I walk through a dark valley, I fear no harm for you are at my side”)

Up until now it is as if the sheep have been boasting about the excellent care it has received on the “home ranch” in the winter and spring - now it turns to address the shepherd directly - note the personal pronouns, deep affection - forged through the long treks into the high country with their summer range.

You’ve heard the famous story about the dinner party attended by both Fulton Sheen and

Richard Burton. The host, at the end of the meal, drew attention to both guests, observing that both were distinguished public speakers. He then asked if both would read Psalm 23, "***The Lord Is My Shepherd.***" Richard Burton did so with the precision, cadence, and drama one would expect from a Shakespearean actor, and the guests applauded vigorously; Fulton Sheen then read the psalm with obvious devotion, meaning, and depth, and the guests remained in reverential silence.

The host commented, "*The actor knew the psalm, the preacher knew the Shepherd.*"

These long treks are time spent in close companionship and solitary care of the good shepherd. The sheep move alone slowly, feeding as they go, gradually working their way up the mountains behind the receding snow. With the approach of autumn, they withdraw back down to lower elevations, finally coming back to the home where they will spend the winter.

During this time the flock is entirely alone with the shepherd. They are in intimate contact with him and under his most personal attention day and night. All of this is done against a dramatic background of wild mountains, rushing rivers, alpine meadows and high rangelands.

Shepherd would never take his flock where he had not already been before. Already he had gone ahead to look over the country with care.

Every mountain has its valleys. Its sides are scarred by deep ravines and gulches and draws. And the best way to the top is always along these valleys. He leads his flock gently, but persistently up the paths that wind through the dark valleys. No fear, it is just going to higher ground. The way of the gentlest grade but also it is the well watered route. It is also where the richest feed and best forage is found.

The shepherd knows from past experiences that predators can easily take cover in the broken cliffs and from their vantage point prey on the flock. He knows these valleys can be subject to sudden storms and flash floods that send walls of water rampaging down the slopes. There could be rock slides, mud or snow avalanches and a dozen other natural disasters that would destroy or injure his sheep. But despite such hazards he also knows that this is the best way to take his flock to the high country. He spares himself no pains or trouble or time to keep an eye out for any danger that may develop.

"Your rod and your staff are there to soothe me." ("...give me courage")

In the Middle East the shepherd carries only a rod and staff - the minimum equipment.

The rod is an extension of the owner's right arm. It stands as a symbol of his strength, power and authority in any serious situation. The rod was what he relied upon to safeguard both himself and his flock in danger. It was also the instrument he used to discipline and correct any wayward sheep that insisted on wandering away.

Another interesting use of the rod was to examine and count the sheep (Ezekiel 20:37 "***I will***

make you pass under the crook, bring you to respect the covenant and rid you of the rebels who have revolted against me.”). The shepherd takes his rod and parts the sheep’s wool to determine the condition of the skin, the cleanliness of the fleece and the conformation of the body. (Ps.139:23,24 ***“God, examine me and know my heart, test me and know my concerns. Make sure that I am not on my way to ruin, and guide me on the road to eternity”***)

It is also used both as a defence and a deterrent against anything that would attack.

No one in any other profession carries a shepherd’s staff or crook. It is uniquely an instrument used for the care and management of sheep. Essentially a symbol of concern - for their comfort.

It is also a special comfort to the shepherd himself. In the tough tramps and during the long weary watches with his sheep he leans on it for support and strength.

There are three areas of sheep management in which the staff plays a most significant role. The first of these lies in drawing the sheep together into an intimate relationship. The shepherd will use his staff to gently lift a newborn lamb and bring it to its mother if they become separated. He does this because he does not wish to have the ewe reject her offspring if it bears the odour of his hands upon it.

In the same way the staff is used to reach out and catch individual sheep and draw them close to himself for intimate examination.

It is also used for guiding sheep - laid gently against the animal’s side, the pressure applied guides the sheep in the way that the owner wants it to go. This touch will at times mirror a “hand-in-hand” approach of a special pet or favourite.

Presence of the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament - There is a calm, quiet repose in the knowledge that he is there to direct even in the most minute details of daily living. He can be relied upon to assist us in every decision, and in this lies tremendous comfort. I have often said to a priest struggling with a decision e.g. delay of confirmation, “Go and pray in front of the Blessed Sacrament for half an hour and ask for direction. He will give it to you.”

Intimacy. “What would you do in this case?” Or “You are here now. You know all the complexities; tell me precisely what is the best procedure at this point.” The thrilling thing is He does just that.

“You prepare a table for me under the eyes of my enemies.” (“You set a table before me as my enemies watch”)

The high plateaux of the sheep ranges are always referred to as “mesas” - the Spanish word for “tables”.

Early in the season, even before all the snow has been melted by spring sunshine, he will go ahead and make preliminary survey trips into the rough, wild country. He will look it over with

great care, keeping ever in mind its best for his flock during the coming season.

The just before the sheep arrive he will make another expedition to prepare the tableland for them. He takes along a supply of salt and minerals to be distributed over the range at strategic spots for the benefit of the sheep during the summer. He will also decide well ahead of time where his camps will be located. He will check to see if there are poisonous weed appearing, and if so, he will plan his grazing program to avoid them, or take drastic steps to eradicate them.

He will also look for signs of predators.

He clears out the water holes, springs and drinking places for his stock. He has to clean out the accumulated debris of leaves, twigs, stones and soil which may have fallen into the water source during the autumn and winter.

“You anoint my head with oil, my cup brims over.” (“...overflows”)

Sheep are especially troubled by the nose fly, as it is sometimes called. These little flies buzz about the sheep’s head, attempting to deposit their eggs on the damp, mucous membranes of the sheep’s nose. If they are successful the eggs will hatch in a few days to form small, slender, worm-like larvae. They work their way up the nasal passages into the sheep’s head; they burrow into the flesh and there set up an intense irritation accompanied by severe inflammation.

For relief from this agonizing annoyance sheep will deliberately beat their heads against trees, rocks, posts, or brush. They will rub them in the soil and thrash around against woody growth. The sheep become frantic with fear and pain in their attempt to escape their tormentors. All this excitement can have a devastating effect as they rapidly lose condition and weight.

At the first sign of flies among the flock, the shepherd applies an antidote to their heads. Homemade remedies composed of linseed oil, sulphur, and tar, for example, are applied to the sheep’s nose and head as a protection.

Summertime is also scab-time spread through direct contact between infected and non-infected animals. In some countries the entire flock is put through a dip, soaking the entire body.

In the autumn, the season of the rut, of mating, of great battles between the rams for possession of the ewes. The necks of the monarchs swell and grow strong. They strut proudly across the pastures and fight furiously for the favour of the ewes. The crash of heads and thud of colliding bodies can be heard through the hours of day and night.

The shepherd knows that some of the sheep will and can actually kill, injure and maim each other in these deadly contacts. So he decides on a very simple remedy, he smears the heads of the rams with grease, making them glance off each other in the crashing battles.

In the midst of our own irritation and inflammation - there is immense relief in spiritual direction. The problem is finding one. Elaborate - use the wrong model, think that we need someone exceptionally holy, old, wise, etc. Look around and don't see anyone who fits the bill and so we

give up. Wrong model - we simply need a person of faith and common sense who prays.

Among God's people there is a considerable amount of knocking each other. Somehow if we don't see eye to eye with the other person, we persist in trying to assert ourselves and become "top sheep." A good many become badly bruised and hurt this way.

"Kindness and faithful love pursue me every day of my life." ("Only goodness and love will pursue me all the days of my life")

A beautiful summary - privileged position - the object of the shepherd's love. So goodness and mercy should follow me, should be left behind me, as a legacy to others, wherever I may go.

It is worth reiterating at this point that sheep can, under mismanagement, be the most destructive livestock. In short order they can ruin and ravage land almost beyond remedy. But in bold contrast they can, on the other hand, be most beneficial.

Their manure is the best balanced of any produced by domestic stock. When scattered efficiently over the pastures it proves of enormous benefit to the soil. The sheep's habit of seeking the highest rise of ground on which to rest insures that the fertility from the rich low land is re-deposited on the less productive higher ground. No other livestock will consume as wide a variety of herbage. Sheep eat all sorts of weeds and other undesirable plants which might otherwise invade a field. In a few years a flock of well-managed sheep will clean up and restore a piece of ravaged land as not other creature can do..

In antiquity, often referred to as "those of golden hooves."

Is. 52:7 ***"How beautiful on the mountains, are the feet of the messenger announcing peace..."***
The tremendous potential that we have for either good or evil.

"I make my home in the house of the Lord for all time to come." ("I will dwell in the house of the Lord for years to come.")

The psalm opened with the proud, joyous statement, "the Lord is my Shepherd"; now it closes with an equally positive, buoyant affirmation.

The shepherd has taken them from the green pastures and still waters of the home ranch, up through the mountain passes onto the high tablelands of the summer range. Fall has come with its storms and rain and sleet that drives the sheep down the foothills and back to the home range for the long quiet winter. In a sense this is coming home. It is a return to the fields and corrals and barns and shelters of the owner's home. During all season of the year, with their hazards, dangers and disturbances, it is the rancher's alertness, care and energetic management that he has brought the sheep through satisfactorily.

Challenge is to live ever aware of God's presence.

PDV 72....."As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace" (1 Pt. 4:10). If he is to live daily according to the graces he has received, the priest must be ever more open to accepting the pastoral charity of Jesus Christ granted him by Christ's Spirit in the sacrament he has received. Just as all the Lord's activity was the fruit and sign of pastoral charity, so should the priest's ministerial activity be. Pastoral charity is a gift, but it is likewise a task, a grace and a responsibility to which we must be faithful. We have, therefore, to welcome it and live out its dynamism even to its most radical demands. This pastoral charity, as has been said, impels the priest and stimulates him to become ever better acquainted with the real situation of the men and women to whom he is sent, to discern the call of the Spirit in the historical circumstances in which he finds himself and to seek the most suitable methods and the most useful forms for carrying out his ministry today. Thus pastoral charity encourages and sustains the priest's human efforts for pastoral activity that is relevant, credible and effective. But this demands some kind of permanent pastoral formation.