

FROM THE PASTOR

Dear Brothers and Sisters



“I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep”

Sheep were a common sight where I grew up in Wales. White specks against green grass; dotted over the mountainsides and valleys.

The imagery of sheep and shepherds used to be common to everyone of faith, no matter which country they lived in. Whereas today, on entering a church, we are accustomed to see the crucifix, prior to the third century - when the image of Christ on the Cross became the essential symbol of Christianity- the Savior was represented in Christian art, and in the prayers of the first generations of believers, as a young shepherd.

In his book “The Burning Bush” Lev Gillet, a monk of the Orthodox Church, gives a meditation on what is perhaps the most popular of all Psalms, the “Shepherd Psalm, Psalm 23”. He says:

There is no doubt that Jesus, when he spoke of the good shepherd, had the twenty-third psalm in mind. He himself had certainly recited it, and knew it even as a small child:

“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want”

This is not a forecast of the future: ‘the Lord will be my shepherd’

This is not a wishful prayer: ‘Lord, be my shepherd’

It is a statement of fact: ‘The Lord is my shepherd’

The Lord is not any kind of shepherd. He is not a shepherd in an abstract or general sense. He is not shepherd of the flock as a flock. He is not ‘our shepherd’. Or rather he is our shepherd, but he is also something else and something more. He is my Shepherd.’

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, lays down his life for his sheep.

I was once in Corsica a French island in the Mediterranean and was shown the sheep folds which shepherds use to gather the flock at night. A round circle of stones, waist high, with an opening through which the sheep enter or leave the enclosure. But there was no door or gate at the opening. The shepherd himself lies down there at night. He is the door, he is the gate. A wolf would have to kill him before getting at the sheep. No one goes in or out except through him. As psalm 121 says: *He does not sleep, he guards your going in and out, now and for always.*

Only in the measure we discover this are we then able to say ‘I lack nothing’. Translated, if I am lacking something today, if there is something missing in my life, it is because the Lord is not my shepherd, my ‘going in and out’ is not through him, I am not listening to his voice, I am not following him.

The Good News is that the Good Shepherd will speak to us in the Liturgy today. He invites us to listen to his voice, that our going in and out may be through him. Together with the psalmist may each of us be able to say: it is true, he is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

Happy Easter, Fr. Sean