

BE A GOOD SHEPHERD

John 10.1-18

All of our life is a training to be good shepherds after the example of Jesus. How can we follow Jesus? When we approach Jesus we all feel that we belong. He never excluded anyone from his company. He is indeed the Good Shepherd. When we feel accepted, we feel as though we "belong", don't we? We feel as though we are on the same team; we have a place in the world, a purpose in being here; we feel aligned with others to whom we are connected in the most basic way. Therefore, doesn't it make sense that one of the simplest ways we can convey acceptance is by being inclusive and by helping others feel as though they belong as well? In short, we do this by saying *yes* to those we meet. We do this by including others in our thoughts, our prayers, and our actions; we do this by rooting out all the various shadowy forms of prejudice and intolerance in our own hearts. We do this by cultivating thoughts and wishes of well-being, loving-kindness, and compassionate concern for all that lives, breathes, and is. Let us then go through the words of Jesus:

i) *"The sheep hear his voice as he calls his own sheep by name"* (verse 3): The reference here is to

our Baptism. The sheep hear the voice of the shepherd: Hearing is a necessary attitude for a deeper relationship. To call by name the sheep is an attitude that creates a friendship relationship. In Baptism we are called by name. Of course our names are carved on the palm of his hand. He will never forget our names (Eph 1.4; Jer 1.1-2). God calls us personally by name.

ii) *“He leads them out”* (verse 3b): Leading them out to the pastures. When he leads them out he strengthens them; this points to Confirmation. The sacrament of confirmation is to fortify us. We are led into the world to face the realities of the world. It is not by living isolated that we are able to proclaim the word, rather we need to face and challenge the world. “He goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him, because they know his voice.” We are called to lead the sheep out into the world. Through our formation we are equipped to face the challenges and at the same time to help others to face theirs. Ultimately we should be able to lead them to pastures – God.

iii) *“Whoever comes in by me will be saved; he will come in and go out and find pasture”* (verse 9): The reference here is to the Holy Eucharist. Jesus gives us food and nourishes us. We need to enter the gate to get our food. The gate is the Church. The food is the Eucharist. “I have come in

order that you might have life – life in all its fullness” (verse 10).

iv) *“I am the good shepherd who is willing to die for the sheep”* (verse 11). This refers to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Jesus in fact died for our sins. He has given us this sacrament of reconciliation so that we might come back even when we are wounded. The good shepherd comes in search of the lost sheep.

v) *“I am the good shepherd. As the Father knows me and I know the Father, in the same way I know my sheep and they know me”* (verses 14-15). This verse refers to the Anointing of the Sick. The doctor knows the sickness, the patient. His work is to suggest medicine. Strengthen him. Jesus knows us better than we ourselves know. The shepherd has to nurse the wounds of his sheep.

vi) Jesus invites all of us to become the good shepherds. Peter was asked thrice *“do you love me more than the others do?”* (Jn 21.15-19). At the reply Jesus says, *“feed my sheep”*, which signifies, if Jesus is the shepherd we too are called to be the shepherds. This invitation is a call either to a lay person or to a priest to be the shepherd. (Religious life, Priesthood, and Matrimony.)

Being a Good Shepherd in my Community

- Timetable (organizing our life; hobbies). Do I observe my personal timetable and the community timetable? In fact, observing the timetable helps others to be of help to you and you will be of help to someone else. It is necessary to be punctual. Just imagine how much tension you create when you are not punctual.
- Putting order in our cubicles or rooms. Order in our personal life is the norm for order in a community. Disorder in my own room signals disorder in me; hence the natural consequence: I create disorder in my community.
- Giving good example: responsibility, work, virtues, etc. Being a good shepherd is to give a good example not just for the sake of inspiring others but rather to generate interest in others.
- Good intentions and goodwill. Often we never take the initiative to appreciate or appreciate our companions. We just take the goodness of others for granted. Often we express to a third party that the other person is good. Well, there is nothing wrong in appreciating people. Since we are human, a kind encouraging word has its own effect in the community.

- Helping those who are weak; giving them time.
- Consoling the distressed.
- Respecting the others whom we do not appreciate or like.
- Loving and caring for the house as if it were your own property.
- Looking after the house. Shepherding the house (it is not only the responsibility of the superior, it is the responsibility of all).

Being a Good Shepherd in the World Outside

- Teaching: Teaching is an art. This is acquired and one becomes a good teacher over years. Teaching is a commendable work at the service of the kingdom. This calls for a disciplined approach on our part. We cannot be good teachers if we fail to communicate with words and gestures. Our words should be meticulously chosen and our gestures should be filled with kindness and compassion. Rude gestures can hurt the listener. This is an art that is learnt over years. The effort we put into perfecting the quality of our service lifts us up from being mediocre.
- Meeting with people, and relationship: We meet a lot of people and most of them seem to be just sheep. When you meet people look at

them and listen to them. Refrain from making judgments in your mind. When you meet people try to control your thoughts. Do not be prejudiced. Relationships can be built only if you can be open and sincere.

- Dealing with our family members: Family members are supposed to be your dear and near ones. They need you for guidance and inspiration. If you are a dictator they will not approach you. You need to understand them because you are more likely to be more knowledgeable and wiser than they are.
- Trust: Trusting people is the primary characteristic of a good shepherd. The moment you begin to doubt, you cannot establish a lasting trust. Do not just be carried away by what others speak about a person. Try to find out the riches of the person through personal contact. This requires patience. It is easy to fall a prey to the comments of others. Well, we need to interact with the person in a responsible manner. The word trust has the letter “u” in the middle, which signifies that you need to balance your personality well when you deal with him.
- Good example: Nothing speaks louder than your personal example.

- Dealing especially with the opposite sex: Shepherding the flock means dealing with all types of people. It could be that often we tend to become rigid or too lax with the opposite sex. There are no hard and fast rules regarding our relationship with men or women. A healthy and balanced approach could be the finest norm that can guide us.

Christianity is a religion of joy that invites every human being to experience liberation from feelings of inadequacy, guilt, and worthlessness. It's an experience that calls every one to be the light and the salt of the earth. More than underscoring our shortcomings, the teachings of Jesus open for us a deep appreciation of God's unfathomable love for every person. God's love does not depend on how good we are, how bright or promising, how conscientious or even caring. It's hard to believe it, but God loves us just because we are. How do we know this? Jesus, God incarnate, demonstrates this in his interaction with people.

Jesus surrounded himself with the "losers" of his day: prostitutes, tax-collectors (hated because they cheated the public), lepers (their disease made them total outcasts), and the poor and disadvantaged. His primary followers were a group of mostly fishermen who, he promised

would learn to "fish for people." These followers often misunderstood Jesus, and when Jesus was being persecuted, they deserted and denied him. Jesus was amazingly patient, always forgiving, always meeting people on their own terms. He was slow to condemn and quick to bring out the best even in the least likely people. The transformation of these followers came as a result of their gradual appreciation for the mystery of God's love for them. If God could accept and love them despite their sins and shortcomings, perhaps they could learn to accept and love themselves!

Jesus does hold up ideals that are never possible to be fully emulated here on earth. His desire is to bring out the best in each of us and not to lay some guilt trap. Even those whom we call "saints" (the holy ones) are hardly without faults. What makes someone a saint is not his/her but the quality of his/her love for others. Those who live more and more for others, who, like Jesus, extend themselves to respect and value every other person, are God's saints.

Ironically, it is often when we do feel inadequate or sinful that God's love and grace come to reassure us and turn us around. "Blessed are those who know their need of God, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3). What is important before God is not our perfection - as if that were possible - but our understanding that we

need God in order to find our deepest selves. When we know our need of God, we understand that the world does not rest on our shoulders, that someone loves us deeply despite our many warts, that we will never be alone, and that our life is not a test we have to pass. Rather, life is a relationship with God we are called to live.

Questions for Reflection

- a How can I become a good shepherd in the community in which I live?
- b Have I tried to trust others or do I nurture a doubtful mind always?
- c Can I think of losing my life for the sheep?
- d Do I really feel let down when things do not go according to my plan?
- e Why do I think that I can do better than others?
- f The Son of Man came to serve and not to be served; has my life become service-oriented?
- g Do you wish to be the centre of attraction always?
- h Humility should be the hallmark of every shepherd. Has humility been a difficult virtue to practise?

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