A GOOD DEED DONE IN HIS NAME

No matter what image or illustration Jesus chose to describe himself in the gospels -- and there were many -- they all were examples of one thing: love in action. Jesus said: “I am the Bread of Life; feed upon me and you shall live.” “I am the Way; follow me and you shall find your path.” “I am the Vine; remain in me and you shall bear much fruit.” And today Jesus says: “I am the Good Shepherd; I lay down my life for my sheep.” In Our Lord’s tender care we find safety and security. His example of living in God moves us to imitate the freedom and courage which Jesus demonstrated in giving his life for others.

In Brooklyn, New York, there is a school that works with learning disabled children. Some remain there for their entire school career; others are mainstreamed into conventional schools. At a fundraising dinner, the father of one of the students gave a speech that would never be forgotten by those who attended. After extolling the school and its dedicated staff, he cried out: “Where is the perfection in my son Timmy?” Everything God does is done with perfection. But my child cannot remember facts and figures as other children do. Where is God’s perfection?” The audience was shocked by the question, pained by the father’s anguish and stilled by the piercing questions.

“I believe,” the father answered, “that when God brings a child like this into the world, the perfection that he seeks is in the way people react to this child.” And he told this story about his son Timmy:

One afternoon Timmy and his dad walked past a park where some boys Timmy knew were playing baseball. Timmy asked: “Do you think they’ll let me play?” Tim’s father knew that his son was not at all athletic and that most boys would not want him on their team. But Tim’s father understood that if his son was chosen to play it would give him a comfortable sense of belonging. Timmy’s father approached one of the boys in the field and asked if his son could play. The boy looked around for guidance from his team-mates. Getting none, he took matters into his own hands and said, “We’re losing by six runs and the game is in the eighth inning. I guess he can be on our team; we’ll try to put him up to bat in the ninth inning.”

Timmy’s father was ecstatic as his son smiled broadly. Timmy was told to put on a glove and go out to play short center field. In the bottom of the eighth inning, Timmy’s team scored a few runs but was
still behind by three. In the bottom of the ninth inning, Timmy’s team scored again and now with two outs and bases loaded, with the potential winning run on base, Timmy was scheduled to be up. Would the team actually let Timmy bat at this juncture and give away their chance to win the game?

Surprisingly, Timmy was given the bat. Everyone knew that it was all but impossible because Timmy didn’t even know how to hold the bat properly, let alone hit with it! However, as Timmy stepped up to the plate, the pitcher moved a few steps to lob the ball in softly so that Timmy would at least be able to make contact. The first pitch came in and Timmy swung clumsily and missed. One of Timmy’s team-mates came up to him and together they held the bat and faced the pitcher, waiting for the next pitch. The pitcher again took a few steps forward to toss the ball softly toward Timmy. As the pitch came in, Timmy and his team-mate swung and together they hit a slow ground ball to the pitcher. The pitcher picked up the ball and could easily have thrown the ball to the first baseman. Timmy would have been out and the game would have ended. Instead the pitcher took the ball and threw it on a high arc to right field, far beyond the reach of the first baseman. Everyone started yelling: “Timmy, run to first, run to first!”

Timmy scampered along the baseline, wide-eyed and startled. By the time he reached first base, the right fielder had the ball. He could have thrown the ball to the second baseman who would tag out Timmy. But the right fielder understood what the pitcher’s intentions were, so he threw the ball high and far over the third baseman’s head. Everyone yelled: “Run to second, run to second.” Timmy ran toward second base as the runners ahead of him deliriously circled the bases toward home. As Timmy reached second, the opposing shortstop ran to him, turned him in the direction of third base and shouted, “Run to third.” As Timmy rounded third, the boys from both teams ran behind him screaming, “Timmy, run home!” He ran home, stepped on home plate, and all eighteen boys lifted him on their shoulders and made him a hero. He had just hit a “grand slam” and won the game for his team. “That day,” said the father, with tears now rolling down his face, “those eighteen boys reached their level of God’s perfection.”

“I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. These also I must lead, and they will hear my voice, and there will be one flock, one shepherd.” The image of Jesus the Good Shepherd from the early Christian catacombs depicts a young man with a lamb over his shoulder, obviously returning it to the fold. That image was common in pagan Roman antiquity -- the depiction of one of
their gods, the shepherd boy. However, it captured the Christian imagination and was assimilated into their painting and iconography because it so aptly illustrated the tenderness of Jesus toward his flock, and toward those outside the flock.

The image served as a comfort to their own hearts and a challenge to their faith. It was their mission or vocation to put love into action as Jesus did. In the spirit of the Savior, they to were to lead and gather the lowly ones into the one fold as he did.

No wonder the early Christian community was made up of so many of society’s outcasts -- widows and orphans, the cripple and the lame, prostitutes and soldiers, tax collectors and sinners. These were all forgiven and restored, broken but made whole. They were incorporated into the Body of Christ and made one with the community. As Peter stood before the leaders of the people and testified: “If we are being examined today about a good deed done to a cripple... it was in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene.” All Peter and John and the disciples did was follow suit after their Teacher and Lord. “As I have done to you, so must you do to others.”

All around us we see love in action -- good deeds done in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene. The unconditional love of parents as you care for your children, the dedicated service to the Church of her ordained and lay ministers as we pray for more vocations to ministry in the Church on this “Good Shepherd” Sunday, the outreach to thousands being served by Catholic Charities and our Diocese of Oakland whose annual Bishop's Appeal we are asked to support, the good work being done here in our own community, even the construction of a new Community Center that we see happening each week right before our eyes -- the small and giant transformations that have taken place in your own lives when God’s Spirit has moved you in unexpected ways. In following the lead of Jesus the Good Shepherd, we each strive to become Christ for one another, and especially for the lost and forgotten. It’s no easy task, but it is a role in life we can be be sure will bring us fulfillment and provide joy and happiness to those whose lives we touch.

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