

In our Gospel reading, Jesus referred to himself as the Good Shepherd. This is really one of my favorite images of Jesus because it captures the tenderness of God. At the start of his ministry, Jesus said that he came to restore sight to the blind, to give freedom to the captives, and to heal the broken hearted. It's not that Jesus came to reject the old law, the covenant that had been established between God and the people of Israel, but rather, he came to breathe new life into it.

On the night before he died, Jesus shared a meal with his closest friends and family. On the very night he washed their feet, and gave them the gift of the Eucharist, Jesus also shared the words: **“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God, have faith also in me.”**

He shared these words knowing the tragic events that were about to unfold to encourage those gathered with him to not lose hope, to not accept defeat, for in the end, love would triumph. It's the triumph of love that we celebrate during this Easter Season.

In his book “Bread for the Journey, Henri Nouwen, a noted Dutch theologian wrote: **“When God makes a covenant with us, God says: ‘I will love you with an everlasting love. I will be faithful to you, even when you run away from me, reject me or betray me.’** Those beautiful words capture the depth of God's love. No matter what the world thinks of us, no matter what we think of ourselves, God never stops believing in us, in our potential, and God never stops loving us. That powerful message of love is the cornerstone of our faith. The one thing we can count on in both life and death is God's abiding love.

Faith is more than just believing in a doctrine. Faith involves being in a relationship with God. Being in a relationship takes work on our part; healthy relationships are never one-way streets. While God will love us to the end, the question for us to ponder is how we respond to that love. How do we create our home with God in this life, so that we can dwell in God's house for all eternity?

Faith is the key. Jesus wants us to trust, trust that he is with us in the good times and the difficult times of our lives. Jesus doesn't want us to lose hope, to give up, to turn away. There are many temptations in life, but we will never find our happiness outside of God's presence. We might find pleasure, we might find temporary relief, but it will never lead to true and lasting happiness.

That is not to say we have to live austere lives, for Jesus knew how to have fun. He laughed, he drank, he teased, he feasted on fine food, but he never let them control him. Love was the guiding force of his life. He was motivated out of love, love for God and love for neighbor. The message for us is to enjoy life, all that the world has to offer, but not to let the drive for material pleasure, take us away from God and from one another.

Jesus told his friends, you and me included, that he would prepare a home for us at the end of our life's journey. In his life work, Jesus showed us the way to his home, to our eternal home. We don't need a map to get there, for Jesus is the way, and he is walking with us step by step. When we take time to pray, to believe, to make room for him in our busy lives, to feast at this table, we will know the way because Jesus, the Good Shepherd, will be leading us home. **“Do not let your hearts be troubled.”**

So today, in our Eucharist, let us acknowledge Jesus as our way, our truth, and our life, and re-commit ourselves to being with him in life and in death. And today too, let us ask Jesus to help us recognize his face in the faces of not just our family and friends, but also in the faces of the lost and the broken, and ask Jesus to help us do all we can to wipe away their tears and comfort them in their distress and brokenness. That's what Jesus did, and that is what we too should do.

I want to end with a prayer from St. Teresa of Avila:

**“May today there be peace within. May you trust God that you are exactly where you are meant to be. May you not forget the infinite possibilities that are born of faith. May you use those gifts that you have received, and pass on the love that has been given to you. May you be content knowing you are a child of God. Let this presence settle into your bones, and allow your soul the freedom to sing, dance, praise and love. It is there for each and every one of us.”
Amen.**