

July 18 2021 Deacon Jim (Mark 6 30-34)

The psalm that we responded to today is psalm 23. Most of us here are familiar with that psalm perhaps because it's more popular than the rest of the psalms. The response today was "The Lord is my shepherd there is nothing I shall want". To be a shepherd is a responsibility that most Americans today would not care to undertake. The hours were long, it was a lot of responsibility and most of all it was a dangerous job. You had to look out for the sheep no matter what the danger. There were always predators lurking in the shadows waiting for the right moment to pounce on one these innocent little creatures. It was the shepherds responsibility to defend against these predators and even kill them if necessary. Today we call Jesus the Good Shepherd, his hours are long the flock is huge and he's always looking out for our well being.

The difference between us and the real sheep is that we have the capacity to thank the shepherd for all his hard work. By reciting psalm 23 we are thanking God by recognizing what he has done for us.

I would ask you to please humor me and repeat the response again with me, "The Lord is my shepherd there is nothing I shall want".

When you say these words do you feel like a member of the flock or do you feel like a lost sheep?

This psalm is meant to bring us comfort, to re-enforce our belief that the will of the Father was, and always will be, to pour upon us graciously of his abundant love, a love that is eternal not given or taken away but always available to everyone.

There are a lot of things going on in this world that are drawing us away from the faith. The devil puts all kinds of obstacles in front of us to make it happen. He uses darkness to try and overshadow the light of Christ. We live constantly on the edge of that darkness and the devil is waiting in the darkness, waiting to pounce on us.

My favorite verse from psalm 23, and the devil hates this verse, is "Even though I walk in the dark valley I fear no evil for you are at my side"

July 18 2021 Deacon Jim (Mark 6 30-34)

Jesus Knows when we are feeling lost, and that's why he walks with us, why he there for us every step of the way.

Psalm 34 says "the Lord hears the cry of the poor", the poor are not just those who lack material things. God also hears the voice of the people crying out for justice or peace or mercy or compassion and love. He hears the voice of the sheep crying out for the shepherd to draw them into the flock.

Let's suppose that the Lord didn't quite hear your response to psalm 23 so let's repeat it one more time, but this time I want you to repeat it not like you're responding to the psalm, but like your soul is truly crying out to God. You've accepted his grace, you feel the warmth of his love "The Lord is my shepherd there is nothing I shall want".

Now close your eyes and listen and try and picture in your mind the immense beauty of God's love for us.

In verdant pastures he gives me repose;

Beside restful waters he leads me;

He refreshes my soul.

He guides me in right paths for his name's sake.

Even though I walk in the dark valley I fear no evil; for you are at my side with your rod and your staff that give me courage.

You spread your table before me in the sight of my foes; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

Only goodness and kindness all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for years to come."

In the Gospel today the disciples are returning to Jesus and he sees their weariness so he wishes to take them somewhere that they can't rest from their travels, away from the crowds. Unfortunately for the disciples, the crowd, the people so hungry to be fed by Jesus' words follow them and Jesus once again is

July 18 2021 Deacon Jim (Mark 6 30-34)

needed to be the Good Shepherd and is called to tend his flock. St Mark tells us “his heart was moved with pity for them, for they were like sheep without a shepherd”.

We have good shepherds in our priests and bishops but there numbers a dwindling.

We don't always think that the disciples themselves, although they were shepherds in training, were also members of the flock. They also needed to be led to greener pastures. Jesus wished it for his disciples but the needs of the people were too great. We need to pray for our priests and all our clergy, and we especially need to pray for vocations. Young men today aren't exactly knocking on the doors of the seminary waiting to get in. In fact I heard of a young man that was joining a seminary and when his mother found out he was going to seminary she began to weep but not with joy in her heart. We can't judge this woman, we don't know what was in her heart but we need to pray that more young men, like this young man will heed the call to the priesthood. The church needs more shepherds.

These are difficult times for our Church. There are so many struggling with their faith.

In times of transition, like we are going through right now, as our three churches come together, we have to understand that we are not being led to a different pasture but we are continuing our journey to the foot of the cross. We can't lose focus of our main objective in our Catholic faith and that is to get to heaven and bring everyone we know and love with us.

Sometimes the cries of the flock are so loud and so deafening that our shepherds, our priests forget that they are also sheep. They also need to be led to greener pastures where they can rest and find comfort in the arms of our Lord.

So I ask you again when you say these words do you feel like a member of the flock or do you feel like the sheep that is lost?

I was once a lost sheep, but I heard the voice of the shepherd and he brought me safely back to the flock.