

A lady visiting the Holy Land came upon a sheepfold located high on a hilltop. Her attention was drawn to one poor sheep lying by the side of the road bleating in pain. Looking more closely, she discovered that its leg was injured. She asked the shepherd how it happened. He answered sadly “The sheep was straying into unsafe places and fell from the cliff. But once I have nursed it back to health, the sheep will follow me . Because of the loving relationship that will be established as I care for her, in the future she will come instantly at my beck and call.” The woman replied thoughtfully, “Sometimes we poor human sheep also want our stubborn ways and, as a result, stray into dangerous paths until the Good Shepherd finds us and leads us. One of the oldest paintings of Jesus Christ, in the Roman catacombs, represents Jesus as carrying the injured, straying sheep gently on His shoulders back to the sheepfold. This picture of Christ as a good shepherd invites us to consider the great love He has for those who are part of His flock.

In the first reading we see Peter proclaiming how to return to the Lord’s flock, by personal repentance, the purification of Baptism and by receiving the Holy Spirit. In the Second Reading from his 1st Letter, Peter seems to echo the words of Isaiah 53 as he recalls how we had all gone astray like sheep, each taking his own way. Jesus Christ takes on himself the task of reuniting the sheep, as shepherd and guardian of our souls. To be part of the flock of Jesus, we need to listen to the voice of the Lord and know what He asks of us, the conversion of hearts. We are also called to share the shepherd role of Jesus in the work of caring for the flock in our own little ways.

The life of the shepherd is one of personal self-giving and sacrifice. The good shepherd grows up with the flock and stays with the same flock all his life. He knows each and every sheep in the flock individually. He attends to the individual needs of each and every one of them. When the sheep are in danger, he would risk his life to save them. Jesus is the shepherd as well as the lamb who sacrifices himself for us. Jesus is also the “gate for the sheep” because he is the way to salvation. As sheep gate, he leads us to eternal life. The sheep recognize the voice of the shepherd. When they hear the voice of their shepherd they knew that they are safe and they stay close to him and follow him. There is a deep relationship between a shepherd and his sheep. He has the ownership and leadership over us, His flock.

In the modern times we fail to recognize voice of Jesus , the good shepherd. We very often allow ourselves to be passively led by all kinds of manipulation, advertisements , mass media , entertainment and political thinking. As the lost sheep, we go astray from the shepherd and lose the way. As the sheep feels the presence of the shepherd , we also have to feel the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist and in our daily life. We should hear His voice by listening to the scriptures. We need to let Jesus lead us, protect and guide us. When we listen to God’s voice, we find the life of true happiness and peace because Jesus says: “I came that you may have life, life in abundance .” We need to pray as the psalmist “The Lord is my shepherd, there is nothing I shall want. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for He is with me”. Let us pray to the Lord that we may be his good sheep, listening attentively to his voice, and follow his example of self-giving

love. Let us also pray for all our shepherds, especially our religious and political leaders. May they follow the example of Jesus who was willing to serve and lay down his life for his sheep. Amen.