

Ordinary Time 16 The Lord is my Shepherd.

Jeremiah prophesies that God would come “in person” to shepherd His sheep and appoint shepherds. Jesus comes and creates one “body” and unites it (Ephesians 2) “I am the Good Shepherd...I have sheep that are not of this fold...there must be one flock, one Shepherd.” (John 10). In today’s Gospel, Jesus had pity for the shepherds in training who need rest and later for the crowd, who are “like sheep without a shepherd”: easy prey, fearful, grasping at anything that seems to provide a sense of belonging or some fleeting security, following the crowd but missing out on what is truly best, truly nourishing.

King David is understood as the author of Psalm 23, a shepherd who knew what it meant to shepherd. Shepherds are responsible for providing nourishment, protection from danger – sometimes giving their own lives to save the sheep- to be a presence in which the sheep could find comfort and a sense of well-being in a threatening and harassing world. David walked with God The psalm describes David’s experience of His relationship with God.

We affirm that Jesus, the descendent of David by adoption through Joseph, fulfills this psalm for us. He offers us spiritual shepherding that nourishes, guides, and protects our souls. He does this both directly and through His Body the Church because we are called to provide “in person” shepherding

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

In verdant pastures he gives me repose;

Beside restful waters he leads me;

He refreshes my soul.

The first dimension of shepherding is consolation and spiritual refreshment when harried. When I feel most unsure or most worried, His Presence in my life provides assurance and acceptance. He is our Divine recourse when the pain of life is at its most excruciating. We directly experience His consolation by the empathy and concern brothers and sisters in Christ, as well through clergy and other ministers, Christian counselors etc. who are willing to be with us in our moment of need.

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 you rod and your staff that give me courage.

The second dimension is that of spiritual guidance. Jesus provides us with direction in the various challenges and choices that face us. Should I do this or do that? What is best, what is most important? He does this through His Word and through the great wealth of wisdom and insight that is our Catholic Christian tradition, through Scriptural preaching and teaching, spiritual direction and the wise counsel of mature disciples and the inner promptings of the Holy Spirit. In this way Jesus helps us to avoid pitfalls, false choices that look appealing but do not deliver what they promise in the end. In greatest danger, He is there. His guidance and interventions over the course of lives, give us courage to face through our fears.

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

The next dimension is to enable us to experience fulfillment and blessedness in spite of the presence of the Enemy (Satan) who afflicts us in various ways. All of the Sacraments: Baptism, Holy Eucharist, Confirmation, Anointing of the Sick, Reconciliation, and Ordination are prefigured here. These are dependable sources of needed grace throughout our Christian lives in the face of temptation and spiritual attack.

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

The final dimension in Psalm 23 is lifelong fellowship and joy in His Presence. A place in His House, the Church and the local parish family, united fully to Him and the Saints. These final verses point to the persistence of God's love for us, that we always have a place in His heart and in His family. This can only be fulfilled if we are willing to be a church family rather than a collection of independent individuals who briefly share a worship space for an hour a week. As we grow older and our lives reach their culmination, God does not desert us then. He will be with us until our last breath and then beckons us on to the reality of eternal life in the Communion of Saints.

Many of the blessings that are pointed to in this psalm are not always appreciated or received by us. Often, we barely scratch the surface of the spiritual riches that are available to us in a relationship with God in Jesus Christ. We are often tempted to try to find happiness not in the ultimate reality of God but in material things, short-term pleasures, political ideologies, and various kinds of distractions. The tug of taking these

short cuts can be powerful. But in all honesty, we cannot truly find fulfillment in them. Only in God. The Shepherd calls us, invites us to go deeper, to explore more of what He offers in a personal encounter with Him and His Body, the Church, and to take our place in various kinds of shepherding.