

## Jesus, The Good Shepherd

For those of us who live in cities and housing estates of one kind or another, we more than likely don't see a lot of shepherds or indeed sheep! So how are we to make sense of the language and images in the gospel this Sunday?

Jesus was a master story-teller who knew his audience so well. He spoke a language and used words, images and symbols that they understood and appreciated. He spoke about fishing, farming, baking bread, vineyards and off course, sheep and shepherds.

To us today, all sheep look and sound the same. But to a shepherd at the time of Jesus and even today, it is a very different thing altogether. In fact, all sheep are very different from each other; they are not the same and the shepherd knows this well.

The shepherd knows each sheep personally and intimately. The shepherd knows the sheep and the sheep know and trust the shepherd. As the gospel tells us, "The sheep that belong to me listen to my voice, I know them and they follow me."

The shepherd will care for and look after the sheep no matter what's happening and regardless of the weather. Shepherds put the wellbeing and welfare of the sheep before their own needs and wants.

You and I are clearly not sheep! But the rich and ancient symbolism of the shepherd and the sheep has a lot to say and offer us. There are many images that Jesus uses to describe his relationship with us.

The Bread of life, the Light of the world and the Vine and the Branches, to name a few. So, what is the image of the Shepherd saying to us today?

Jesus knows each of us personally and intimately we are not all the same to him. He calls each of us personally by our name and says to us; "if you want to be follower, take up your cross and follow me."

This is what the voice of the shepherd says to each of us today. This is the generous and free invitation Jesus offers us; it is up to us whether or not we accept this invitation and follow Jesus the Shepherd.

We all experience setbacks, difficulties and challenges in our daily lives. When we do, then we can turn to Jesus for comfort and support.

He is like a shepherd feeding his flock, gathering them in his arms, holding them close to his heart.

On this Good Shepherd Sunday, may we open our hearts and lives to the voice and call Jesus who continually says to us, "I call you by your name, you are precious in my eyes and I love you."

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