

Scrupulous ANONYMOUS

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Scrupulous Anonymous
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Jesus Is Our Good Shepherd

by Fr. Thomas M. Santa

Most of us probably don't know much about sheep, but even if all we know about sheep is what we learned from homilies, we do know some things: Left to their own devices, sheep are pretty vulnerable. There's a special bond between shepherds and their sheep. Sheep respond to the voice of their shepherd. And, finally, we know that all of this has something to do with Jesus' identification of himself as our shepherd.

With all the images available to the Lord, why did he so often identify himself as a shepherd? Why did he use this image on numerous occasions to describe the relationship between himself and each of us?

The most obvious reason is that in the time of Jesus there were many shepherds and even more

sheep, so most people knew what he was talking about.

But perhaps Jesus' choice was about more than just convenience. If being a shepherd is all about leading and guiding the flock to safety, Jesus must have thought we need to be protected from something. What could it have been?

Scripture scholars suggest that for the early Church, the image of Jesus as the shepherd was very powerful because the fragile Christian community needed to feel protected from persecution. Friends and family members were hunted down, rounded up, and put to death because they were Christian. It probably gave them great comfort to know that the little flock—the first community of

Christians—would persevere and be brought safely to the kingdom of God.

In later centuries the Christian community was established within the Roman Empire and no longer feared persecution, but life wasn't worry-free. Marauding pirates could sweep down at any moment, active as they were on the Mediterranean Sea. The Vikings and other tribes from the north were constant threats, as were the Germanic tribes, the Lombards, Muslims, and others. It was reassuring to know that Christ was shepherding his people and that, ultimately, there was nothing to fear.

Still later, the threat came from newfangled ideas: The sun, not the earth, is the center of the universe. The Bible can be read and interpreted by people in their own homes—Bible study isn't the exclusive work of priests and nuns. God's people needed to be protected from such ideas so they wouldn't stray from the truth. They needed a shepherd to lead and guide them.

Today, most of us don't have to face the dangers our ancestors feared. But does that mean we no longer need a shepherd? What do we need protecting from? How does Jesus shepherd us today?

For most of us, the real threat isn't from external forces, but from forces within us. We believe in our own intelligence. We trust our own informed opinions. We feel comfortable with what we perceive, and as a result resist many of the values that gave life to our ancestors.

This is wonderful, because it means we're asserting the gifts and talents we've received from God. But we also need to freely put aside total independence, our own opinions and thoughts, and having things our way.

We need a shepherd to help us confront our reluctance to be led. There is something important in the whole idea of being led, and who better to show us the way to the ultimate and eternal truths than Jesus, our shepherd?

For people with scrupulosity, a first step in accepting Jesus as your Good Shepherd is to trust that he will shepherd you from fear and anxiety to confidence and trust.

A second step is to ask the Good Shepherd to help you resist the tendency to be in complete control at each moment. Trust that he will ultimately shepherd you to a place of safety and peace.

Let us pray: "Jesus, our Good Shepherd, guide and lead us today and every day of our life!"

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Reflection

Adapted from *Faithful Meditations for Every Day of Ordinary Time (Weeks 11–22)*
by Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney (Liguori Publications, © 2013).

Sometimes we just wear out. We're tired, spiritless, sad, and lacking in hope. We find it difficult to meet our daily obligations. We doubt we have a purpose. We wonder if life will always be bleak.

Sometimes we carry heavy burdens. We may have health or financial problems. We may be caring for elderly parents who are becoming more frail and forgetful every day. We may be in a dead-end job with no hope for advancement or a higher salary. We may be unable to find a job. We may be alienated from our family and feel the grief of having lost our roots. We may live in a community whose values are at odds with ours, and we feel alone and friendless.

We may worry about terrorism, war, and slavery. We may view natural disasters such as tornadoes and tsunamis as signs that God is punishing the world.

Perhaps the heaviest burden we carry—and the thing that wears us out most—is thinking that we have to make sense of life. Yet we haven't been called to figure out life; we've been called to have faith in God's love and goodness. We've been called to entrust our thoughts, emotions, and actions to God. We've been called to surrender to God's will of love and mercy.

We've been called to come to Jesus, to turn to him in our weary and burdened state and be at rest in his heart of comfort and compassion.

Ponder: What burdens do I carry?

Prayer: Lord, you invite me to rest in you. Teach me to lay down my burdens and rest in the comfort of your love.

Practice: Today I will be faithful by resting from worry.

Scrupulous Anonymous Retreats ***Presented by Fr. Thomas M. Santa, CSSR***

Friday, Sept. 25 – Sunday, Sept. 27, 2015

Cedarbrake Catholic Retreat Center
5602 Highway 317
Belton, TX 76513
254-780-2436
www.bit.ly/ScrupAnonRetreat

Friday, Jan. 15 – Sunday, Jan. 17, 2016

Spiritual Life Center (Wichita, KS)
7100 East 45th Street North
Bel Aire, KS 67226
316-744-0167



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MAILBOX

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NEWSLETTER@LIGUORI.ORG

Q *At the Catholic funeral of a prominent citizen, our non-Catholic governor received holy Communion. Was this a sin for him and for the priest who gave it to him?*

A I wouldn't make that judgment, because I don't know the heart or the conscience of the governor or the priest.

The prevailing pastoral opinion—and one that isn't held by everyone—is that the Communion line isn't the place for a discussion about who should and shouldn't receive Communion. This is a time when it's most appropriate to presume "good conscience" on everyone's part and be at peace about it.

This answer won't satisfy everyone, but it's good pastoral practice.

Q *I have a belligerent brother who attacks the Church at family gatherings. I try to engage him in respectful conversation, but he ends up shouting and making everyone uncomfortable. I feel obligated to defend my faith and the Church. What should I do?*

A He's not hurting the Church; he's only alienating himself from everyone who must endure his childish behavior. Let him be the angry and opinionated person he is and refrain from engaging in conversation with him about these matters. What does it accomplish except to make everyone angry and uncomfortable? If you deprive him of the energy of the argument, he may learn to engage in responsible behavior.

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