

Go Forth...

A SERVICE OF U.S. CATHOLIC MISSION ASSOCIATION

MISSIONARY COMMENTARY

VOCATION OF SHEPHERDING



SUNDAY READINGS:

Acts 2:14, 36-41

Psalm 23:1-6

1 Peter 2:20-25

John 10:1-10

CHRIST-CENTERED SHEPHERDS OF GOD'S PEOPLE

It is now just a little over one year ago that Pope Francis, known as the “people’s pope,” went to his eternal reward (April 21, 2025). He often spoke insightfully on “shepherding,” a pervasive theme of today’s scripture readings. In his first apostolic exhortation (2013),

Evangelii Gaudium [EG] (*The Joy of the Gospel*), Francis invited everyone to daily engagement with Jesus. “I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ.... I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her” [EG 3].

Closeness to God. Pope Francis continues: “Each of us is very dear to God, who loves us, chooses us and calls us to serve.... We would do well each day to pray ... to grow more like him who ‘no longer calls us servants but friends’ (Jn 15:15)” [May 29, 2016]. This is a clear challenge for all Christians: to be “close to God in prayer and close to the people” [January 9, 2018].

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Everyone must daily ask: “Is Jesus Christ at the center of my life? And, what is my relationship with Jesus Christ?” [January 9, 2017]. Expressed simply, all vocations (parents, religious, clergy, teachers, laborers, etc.) must be anchored in one’s friendship with Jesus.

Authentic Shepherding. Words of Pope Francis, though often addressed to priests, equally apply to every Christian, especially to parents. For example, Francis boldly says that people “want and need their shepherds! The faithful never leave us without something to do.... There is a good and healthy tiredness. It is the exhaustion of the priest who wears the smell of the sheep, but also smiles the smile of a father rejoicing in his children or grandchildren.... The smell of the sheep and the smile of a father!” [April 2, 2015].

Speaking of all shepherds and the mission entrusted to them, Francis noted that this mission “brings him joy whenever he is faithful to it, whenever he does all that he has to do and lets go of everything that he has to let go of, as long as he stands firm amid the flock which the Lord has entrusted to him: Feed my sheep (cf. Jn 21:16-17)” [April 17, 2014].

“Have always in mind the example of the Good Shepherd, who came not to be served but to serve; to seek and save that which was lost” [April 17, 2016]. Every shepherd “is called to follow the example of the Good Shepherd, who gave His life for His sheep” [November 16, 2017].

Hearts for the Poor. Pope Francis challenges all Christians to examine their authenticity in living spiritual poverty. Thus, in *Evangelii Gaudium*, Francis has a major section on the inclusion of the poor in the Church and society [EG 186-216]; he strongly reiterates his desire: “I want a Church which is poor and for the poor” [EG 198]. Our Church needs many diverse vocations who are all Christ-centered shepherds of God’s holy people.

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NOTES ON THE SUNDAY READINGS:

First Reading – Acts 2:14, 36-41: This reading from the book of Acts describes the development of the early Church following Jesus' Resurrection. Here we listen to Peter's direct Pentecost preaching; it mandates reform before being baptized and focuses on an authentic conversion, turning away from sin and selfishness to accept the new, risen life in Christ.

Responsorial Psalm – Psalm 23:1-6: This familiar psalm reflects the joy of Easter and Christ's resurrection. Admittedly, we never tire of repeating: "The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want." We firmly believe that because the resurrected Christ lives, "goodness and kindness follow us all the days of our lives."

Second Reading – 1 Peter 2:20-25: The first letter of Peter, probably written from Rome in the sixties, seeks to encourage the Churches in Asia Minor to live in holiness and unity—even though they were facing severe trials. They should treasure their Christian faith, because although they were like straying sheep, they have now "returned to the shepherd and guardian of their souls."

Gospel – John 10:1-10: For the early followers of Christ, their favorite picture of Jesus was the Good Shepherd. For safety in the evening the sheep of various shepherds were often herded together into a common sheepfold and a shepherd slept at the entrance, protecting it with his own body. The next day each shepherd called his sheep; they recognized his unique voice; he led his flock out to verdant pastures.

Notes and Commentary by Maryknoller James H. Kroeger, who recently published three short, meditative books: ► *Living in Joyful Hope*, ► *Exploring Vatican II Treasures*, and ► *A Joyful Journey with Pope Francis* (www.faithalivebooks.com).

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