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Meditations: Sunday of the Fourth Week of Easter (Year C)

Some reflections that can assist
our prayer during this time of
Easter.

03/27/2025

- Jesus is the good shepherd
- Giving one's life for the sheep
- We are all both sheep and
shepherds

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THE GOSPELS proclaimed on the Sundays of the first three weeks of Easter narrate the apparitions of the Risen Christ. Today, however, we are offered the discourse in which Jesus presents Himself as the Good Shepherd. He explains to his listeners the characteristics of the one who watches over the sheep: his attentiveness, his spirit of sacrifice, his union with the Father, his complete freedom to take up this mission. And He seems to encourage them to trust in Him and to want to be part of his fold. Today, Good Shepherd Sunday, the Church invites us to enter the sheepfold of the Risen Christ, to let Him be our guide.

The liturgy for today's Mass begins by addressing a prayer to God the Father that shows us our neediness: "Almighty ever-living God, lead us to a share in the joys of heaven, so that the needy flock may reach

where the brave Shepherd has gone before.”^[1] Jesus knows how much we need his healing power. But the wounds of our sins are not a cause for discouragement; rather they should lead us to trust even more in our Lord. He helps us to realize our neediness and to set our eyes more firmly on God. Jesus has gone before us on the path to eternal life. He opens the way for us and shows us the path to happiness.

The light of Easter illuminates the figure of the Good Shepherd. We realize that Jesus “is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters” (*Ps* 23:1-2). For He has conquered death and returned to life. “After triumphing over hell,” a liturgical hymn exclaims, “the Restorer of the human race returns to heaven, Risen and carrying on his shoulders his lost sheep.”^[2] The sheep

is an image of humanity, an image of each one of us.

“I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep” (*Jn 10:11*). Jesus tells us how a good shepherd can be identified: he is the one who gives himself to care for the souls entrusted to him. For him, that mission is the most important thing. A close relationship exists between the good shepherd and the sheep in his care. He knows them individually, spends time with them, recognizes their bleating, their way of walking... The good shepherd never abandons his sheep for they are part of his own life; while the “hired hand,” the one who doesn’t love them as his own, hardly ever personally puts effort into caring for them.

Jesus emphasizes that He gives his life for his sheep freely, and therefore out of love: “For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again; this charge I have received from my Father” (*Jn* 10:17-18). How much hope it gives us to know we are loved by such a shepherd! Our Lord’s Passion shows us the extreme to which his love for us reaches; while his Resurrection tells us how worthwhile it is to let ourselves be won over by that love, because there we find the strength to begin to lead a new life already here below. “My God,” St. Josemaría exclaimed, “how easy it is to persevere when we know that you are the Good Shepherd, and that we – you and I – are sheep belonging to your flock! For we know full well that the Good Shepherd gives his

whole life for each one of his sheep.”^[3]
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As sheep in Christ's flock, we learn how to go to the places where He gives us his Life: to those times of daily prayer, to the practices of piety throughout our day... But above all, to the sacraments, for through them we are renewed in divine life. Then we can say with the psalmist: “You prepare a table for me in the presence of my foes. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Your goodness and mercy follow me all the days of my life” (Ps 23:5-6).

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THE SUNDAY dedicated to the Good Shepherd is a good day to pray that the care of the Good Shepherd may always be present in the Church. Providing this care is a mission entrusted in a very special way to

sacred ministers. But in a certain sense, all the baptized, identified with Christ, are called to be shepherds of others: to help them by their example, prayer, and advice. That is why Saint Josemaría said that we are all both sheep and shepherds.

To be good shepherds we need to imitate Jesus who serves, heals, accompanies, listens... In short, who gives his life for others freely. “The intermediary, the hireling, does his work and collects his wages. In contrast, the mediator forgets about himself, he gives his life, gives himself. That is the price: his own life, he pays with his own life, with his fatigue, with his work, with so many things.”^[4] The others are never means to achieve something for ourselves, not even goals that may seem lofty to us. This is the attitude of the hireling in the parable; he doesn't care about the sheep but only

about the profit he can make from them.

A good shepherd looks upon each person with God's attitude of self-giving; he sees them in their most essential reality: as a son or daughter of God called to glory and to share in his love. Therefore he serves everyone with joy, and this generates a sincere trust in them. They want to draw near to the shepherd because they know he is seeking only their happiness. After all, the reward for this dedication is also the joy that never ends: "When the Chief Shepherd appears, you will obtain the unfading crown of glory" (1 Pet 5:4).

[1] Roman Missal, Collect Prayer,
Fourth Sunday of Easter Time.

[2] Hymn *Salve dies*.

[3] St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 319.

^[4] Francis, Homily, 9 December 2016.

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