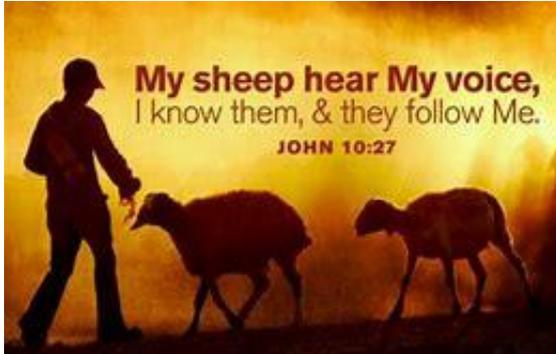


**SUNDAY REFLECTION – 4th SUNDAY OF EASTER -12<sup>th</sup> MAY 2019**

**REFLECTION by Gabrielle JPIC Team**

*"Jesus is the Good Shepherd leading us all into oneness with God. He is also calling each one of us to grow in responsibility to care for others and to become good shepherds: servant leaders. This is a sign of spiritual maturity".*

Jean Vanier

Reflecting on today's celebration of Jesus the Good Shepherd, brings to my mind the earthy language and practical wisdom of Pope Francis encouraging our pastors to be "shepherds who have the smell of their sheep". My thoughts also turn to the cultural differences between the Middle Eastern shepherd looking after a small flock of sheep and knowing them intimately, and our own Australian landscape of wide open spaces, large sheep stations stocked with paddocks grazing hundreds or even a thousand sheep; outwardly not possible to have such intimacy or the same relationship with this scattered flock.

Jesus as Shepherd is not a sentimental or pious image. This peaceful sounding gospel image comes out of a context of conflict with the authorities. By describing himself as the 'shepherd' Jesus clearly identified with those who were marginalized.

Jesus is shepherd because he cares; he took on risks and dangers for us knowing that wolves existed, he became human like us, faced death and betrayal as we must, and gave himself in love. And they listened to him.

Today's gospel is amazingly reassuring for those who truly hear the voice of Jesus.

**GOSPEL OF JOHN 10:27-30**

Jesus said: 'The sheep that belong to me listen to my voice; I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life; they will never be lost and no one will ever steal them from me. The Father who gave them to me is greater than anyone, and no one can steal from the Father. The Father and I are one.'

In the few words expressed in today's Gospel reading, we hear the voice of encouragement, servant leadership, empowerment and responsibility. He 'knows' them. Listening and recognizing the voice of Christ comes with practice and exposure to it.

Jesus invites us to 'follow' him; but what is it about this shepherd that entices us to walk in his path?

Without fully understanding it when first encountered, Jesus' promises of "fullness of life" call us to devote a lifetime of seeking and searching, discovery and adventure to find this treasure, this 'reign of God' in our midst. A gradual awakening takes place in our daily experiences, through mundane events and everyday relationships both difficult and rewarding. Throughout history we have been gifted with hundreds of shepherds who have laid down their lives so that we may have life, just as Jesus promised.

Good Shepherd Sunday is not just about Jesus. It is about us too. God has always sent shepherds or guides into our lives to help us along the way. These are the ones who "follow" him, who live as he lived, caring for the 'flock'. One such Good Shepherd who knows others, loves them, draws them into the spiritual life through his poetry and writing, is Saint John of the Cross. John, one of the most well-known spiritual guides has left us a spiritual heritage of shepherding, and guiding all who are searching for a deeper relationship with the Divine Presence.

John of the Cross guides us to encounter God directly through our senses. We are naturally drawn to the things we can feel and see and grasp. Every part of us is, at its core, a desire for love's fulfillment. We gravitate to the things of God, to things that we sense as good, true, beautiful, and loving. Our mind seeks the truth and wisdom of God, our will seeks to live out the goodness of God; our memory and imagination seek the justice and peace of God.

We do not realise that we love them not for themselves, but because they whisper to us of their Creator, the One we really long for, the One we trust. The struggle is often that the more goodness we experience, the more insatiable is our thirst, the more we want.

With John, the vision of the fullness of God's reign, offers each of us the opportunity and obligation to transform our world in which we live into the reign of God; a responsibility which dares us to let ourselves love, open our arms wide to a world that is desperate for our compassion. Can we shepherd, companion, accompany or guide others along the Way?

This year our Jamberoo Lay Carmelite Community is sinking into the wisdom and beauty of St John of the Cross for our formation. Our last Carmelite community meeting left us on a high note of spiritual nourishment and loving awareness as companions on the journey, being shepherd to each other, guided by the writings of this Spanish Carmelite friar, and expressed in the reflective music of Marty Haugen.

*Shepherd me, O God, beyond my wants,  
Beyond my fears, from death into life.*

*God is my shepherd, so nothing shall I want  
I rest in the meadows of faithfulness and love  
I walk by the quiet waters of peace.*

### **Blessing**

1. May we be shepherds to one another by our caring, supporting and uplifting of others. AMEN.
2. May we be to the world a sign of God's caring, faithful love. AMEN.
3. May we go with trust in Jesus, the model shepherd, and love, not just in words, but truth and actions. AMEN.

### **TO PONDER**

1. Are there spaces and moments in your daily life which you dedicate, in a particular way, to listening to the Word of God?
2. The intimate and profound communication between Christ and you has been defined by the Gospel in today's liturgy by the verb, "to know". Do you allow yourself to be transformed and guided by this voice on the journey of your life?



### **PRAYER INTENTIONS:**

- For the leaders of our nation as we prepare for elections that all will speak truthfully, without malice and bitterness to each other.
- For the people of India as they overcome the devastation and hardship of the recent cyclone.
- For women who find Mother's Day painful because they mourn the loss of children or whose relationships with children or their own mothers have been difficult.
- For the women who have mothered, loved or believed in us and those who have cared for others in impossible situations.

Jesus models a new kind of authority, a servant-leadership that ministers to the members rather than waits to be served by them. He does what, in that culture, slaves did: He, the Lord, washes the feet of the community.

**Joan Chittister osb, from *The Liturgical Year***