

Called to Be Shepherds

This week we celebrate Good Shepherd Sunday! While the imagery can be somewhat lost on today's believer, there was a good reason why the illustration of a shepherd with his sheep was used so often in biblical times ... it was an illustration people could easily identify within their cultural context. Surely we can build on this biblical image and adapt it to our times taking into consideration our role in being shepherds to and for one another.



Illustrations are most effective when they are understood easily by the culture in which we find ourselves and where God has sent us to minister. Middle eastern cultures understood what shepherding was all about. It was about **feeding** the lambs and the sheep, bringing them to good pasture lands and fresh **water**, **grooming** and clipping them, **leading them and teaching them** to stay together, going after the **wandering** lost ones, and **protecting** the sheep in the field and in the fold.

By virtue of our baptism, we are all shepherds for one another, with Jesus Christ as our Good Shepherd. We are invited first to be loved by the Good Shepherd and then challenged to share that love in caring for each other.



Feeding

A shepherd feeds his sheep. Jesus feeds us with his Word and the Eucharist which gives us guidance and food for the journey. As shepherds we too are called to feed the lambs and care for the sheep. So many have not heard the Word of God nor partake of his Body and Blood. Our word, example and invitation can inspire our brothers and sisters to be inspired and fed by the Lord.

Watering

The shepherd gives the sheep fresh and pure water so that they may live. In baptism we are configured to Christ. As shepherds, filled with the gifts of the Spirit, we are called to lead one another to water regularly. So many have been baptized, but the water has dried up and the impact forgotten. Our fresh and living faith can refresh and restore the grace of baptism in others so that the light of God's written Word can shine through and be evidenced in prayer and living joyfully in the example of Jesus Christ.

Grooming

A shepherd grooms his sheep and keeps them clean and free of contamination from the bad things in the world. Jesus tells us of his love and generous mercy. As shepherds we are called to share this message of love and mercy with our friends and family. Many feel unloved and alienated from our faith in Jesus and even from one another. Sharing our story can welcome people back to Jesus, our source of love and mercy.

Shearing

At times sheep must be sheared. This is a useful and profitable process for both the sheep and the shepherd. This is an offering to the Good Shepherd. For the benefit of all, the sheep must be sheared, disciplined, encouraged and rebuked. At times we know we too have gone astray and are in need of shearing to keep us fit for service to the Lord.

As shepherds we too can humbly correct, rebuke and encourage one another—but only with great patience and careful instruction. Our correction can never be judgmental and without compassion, but always attuned to truth and charity.

Leading and Teaching

The shepherd leads the sheep. Jesus is the way that leads us to heaven. As shepherds are also first to be aware of the distractions and pitfalls of the world. We are called to lead by example and contribute to building up our community of faith and working to stay together in unity.

Wandering Sheep

True shepherds make an effort to look for wandering sheep. Jesus seeks those who are lost. The Bible is clear that many people have and will continue to wander from the faith. As shepherds we need to help the return of the people who have wandered.



Protection

The shepherd brings the flock home to the fold at night. He then lays down in the gate physically to protect the sheep from wolves coming into the sheepfold. He literally put his life on the line for the sheep. Jesus does the same for us. As we have seen his example, we are called to do the same, bringing one another into the fold, caring for each other and protecting each other.

Conclusion

The illustration of the Good Shepherd reminds us that we are called to be obedient to the Lord and shepherds in the body of Christ and that we must take that responsibility seriously. We have all seen far too many who claim to be called to servant leadership but demonstrate clearly that they are not qualified to be shepherds according to God's criteria.

This weekend's readings remind us that just as we are the sheep of the Lord, we are also his shepherds. We need to be feeding the lambs and the sheep, bringing them to good pasture lands and water, grooming and clipping them, leading them and teaching them to stay together, going off after the wandering lost ones, and protecting the sheep in the field and in the fold.

