

Jesus, The Good Shepherd.

A message of reflection considering Jesus Christ as our Shepherd and all that this means for our personal spiritual journeys and the Church of God, particularly during times of adversity.

25/4/21

I speak in the name of Jesus the Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to the glory of God the Father.

Amen.

Let us pray:

“O Be joyful in God, all ye lands, alleluia: sing ye praises to the honour of His Name, alleluia: make his praise to be exceeding glorious, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia. Say unto God , O how wonderful art thou in thy works, O Lord: through the greatness of thy power. Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end.”

Amen.

The Lord is risen.

He is risen indeed. Hallelujah!

An extract from today’s Gospel reading:

“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me – just as the Father knows me and I know the Father - and I lay down my life for my sheep.”

(John 10: 14-15)

Eric Bishop once told the story of how during the riots in Palestine in the middle thirties, a village near Haifa was condemned to collective punishment by having its sheep and cattle sequestered by the Government. The inhabitants, however, were permitted to redeem their possessions at a fixed price. Among them was an orphan shepherd boy, whose six or eight sheep and goats were all he had in the world for life and work. Somehow he obtained the money for their redemption. He went to the big enclosure where the animals were penned, offering his money to the British sergeant in charge.

The officer in charge told him he was welcome to the requisite number of animals, but ridiculed the idea that he could possibly pick out his "little flock" from amongst the confiscated hundreds. The little shepherd thought differently, because he knew better; and giving his "own" call, for he had his shepherd's pipe with him, he blew on the pipe and "his own" animals separated from the rest and trotted out after him. "I am the good sheperd and know my sheep – and am known of mine."

This has been a rough week for our city of Cape Town. Through a raging fire on the slopes of Table Mountain, we have lost homes, Mostert's Mill, the Rhodes Memorial Tea Garden, various buildings at the University of Cape Town, including the irreplaceable contents of the library, animals and many firemen were also injured. We salute the various fire men who, at the risk of their own lives, became the great shepherds of our city this past week, as they fought to protect what we all hold dear. Being a fireman or woman, is no mean feat. You are essentially putting your life at great risk for the benefit of others. In many ways the role of a firefighter could be compared to the role of a shepherd.

Let us take a moment this morning and consider the role of a firefighter in terms of the values of a good shepherd...

Here are eight values that we can consider vital for a good firefighter to have if he or she is to be the custodian of our city and our lives during times of adversity.

Firstly, any firefighter must have integrity. This is fundamental. We, the public, or the sheep, need to be able to trust our firefighters at all times. They literally have our lives in their hands at certain times. Firefighters also have to be able to trust each other, no matter what situation they find themselves in. Just as

we are heavily dependent on the actions of the firefighters, so too are we as Christians heavily dependent on the actions of our Shepherd, Jesus Christ and all that He has done for us. "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep."

Secondly, all fire fighters have to be physically fit. If you are an unfit firefighter, you are unable to complete your job. It is as simple as that. Similarly, think of shepherds for a moment in the mountains and rolling hills. They are also fit. Fit to walk many kilometers, carry a wounded sheep and be available at all times. Jesus was fit. Fit spiritually and fit physically, as He cares for his flock. A good shepherd always makes sure that He is able to care for others, by first caring for Himself.

Thirdly, all firefighters are adept at communication. Firefighters need to be able to communicate with each other in harrowing situations, with the public and with anxious victims. Communication may save lives. Like the firefighter, a good shepherd will also be a good communicator. Do you remember the story of the young shepherd in Palestine who went to collect his sheep from the pound? He was able to save his sheep, as he was able to communicate with them through the use of his pipe whistle. So too, we are reminded of Jesus' own self designation as the Good Shepherd. Jesus draws His flock to himself as the great shepherd over the human race.

Fourthly, all firefighters have to show flexibility and adaptability. Things are constantly changing for firefighters and they need to be comfortable with this. Similarly, think of the shepherd operating in different terrain, as they care for their sheep. So too, our Lord is able to care for us, know matter how different we all are from each other, He loves and cares for us all.

Fifthly, firefighters all show a great dedication to their job. You see, mediocrity could cost lives. It is the same with a shepherd. If a shepherd is mediocre in their duties, then sheep may be lost. Jesus was and is never mediocre. Offering up His life for us all is indeed no mediocre action. It is and will remain the ultimate sacrifice.

Sixthly, all firefighters are team players. There is no "I" in team. Working as part of a team means that you are stronger and able to achieve more. Shepherds do often work alone but they also often have a shepherd dog that

they are able to work as a team with in order to lighten their duties. Jesus knew that once He left He would need others to spread the Good News and so He selected the twelve disciples to become a team to spread the Word of God to others.

Seventh, firefighters have to have tolerance for one another. No two of us are the same and if we are to work together as a team, then we need to be big enough to accept that we are all different from one another. Animals have personalities too. The good shepherd is able to keep his family of animals together and safe. Jesus gave us many examples in the Gospels where he showed great tolerance as the good shepherd. We are called to follow His example, too.

Lastly, all firefighters are ready to show great self-sacrifice. They always put the needs of others first, no matter what. The good shepherd does this too, by putting the needs and safety of ther flock first. Jesus has already done this for us by dying on the cross. Here, the greatest self-sacrifice took place for our sins.

As Christians we are called to make a difference in the lives of others so that we can be the light of God. Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice for all of us so that we are able to bear the light of truth and love. He remains the one true great good shepherd of us all and we need to continue to aspire to lead by the example he left us.

This has been a tough week for all. We will survive and we will rebuild. Cape Town has suffered worse times. Our focus must always remain on our Good Shepherd and one another. For if we are able to achieve this, then we are able to face adversity together and continue to build the Kingdom of God in and around us.

A short prayer of thanks for all the firefighters in Cape Town who made a difference:

Merciful Father in heaven, look down in your love upon all those who protect us and ours from the ravages of fire and flame. Grant them the courage and skills to carry out their duties well and safely. When they must go into the face of danger, be by their side in the smoke and flames. Watch over their families,

ever reminding them that those who fight fire are also in your care. This we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour.

Amen.

I wish you and your loved ones a peaceful and blessed Sunday.

Amen.

Fr Darron.

