

ST. JOSEMARIA INSTITUTE PODCAST

CHRIST, THE GOOD SHEPHERD

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In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. My Lord and my God, I firmly believe that you are here; that you see me, that you hear me. I adore you with profound reverence. I ask your pardon for my sins and the grace to make this time of prayer fruitful. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph my father and Lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.

Few images capture the love of Jesus for us more powerfully than the image of the Good Shepherd. The Lord himself tells us in the tenth chapter of Saint John's Gospel: "I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. I am the Good Shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep."

Those who heard these words from Jesus for the first time were undoubtedly moved and also perplexed. They were moved because they had experienced a really good shepherd in their life - they had seen one, perhaps some of them were really good shepherds. Perplexed at the same time, because it is a very strong thing to say that a shepherd will lay down his life for the sheep. They were to discover sometime later how literally the Lord meant that.

There's a very insightful author that you may have come across. His name is Jean Galot. That last name is spelled G-A-L-O-T. Speaking, writing about the Good Shepherd, he says, "The Good Shepherd is first of all one who knows his sheep. He calls them by name. Two passers-by and strangers; a flock is just a flock and all sheep are equal and alike, but for the shepherd, each one is different from the others. Each has its own features and a name. The shepherd knows his sheep perfectly because he loves them and has a personal interest in all of them. And how much love he knows how to put into the name by which he calls them."

Each of us probably has a favorite nickname. A name that those who really are close to us - who know us well, who have known us forever, and above all who love us - that name that they use. You may be familiar with the author James Thurber who wrote back in the 1950s, I think. He came up with a name that is very affectionate and that is most unusual. That name is snooky-ookums. It's probably the first time and the last time you will ever hear that name, but you can give it a try and see that if you call someone you love very much snooky-ookums, they will wonder where you got that name, but they will see the affection you put into it.

Well, God only knows how much affection the Lord himself puts into the name that he uses for us. But even more importantly, as this author goes on to say, knowledge of the name is only

a symbol. What Jesus knows of men is their personality with their innermost feelings. While walking along the streets of

Palestine, the Lord immediately read in every face he met the whole story of a life and the intimate dispositions of a soul. He immediately recognized their deepest thoughts and aspirations. His gaze pierced the mystery of hearts.

This is exactly what is going on in the relationship that each one of us has with our Lord Jesus Christ, our Good Shepherd. He knows us. He loves us. He knows our innermost feelings. He knows our intimate dispositions, our deepest thoughts, our aspirations, our dreams. He sees right now how much we want to get closer to him through this time of prayer, and so he is determined to give himself in this prayer. And even if he sees that we drift off and we get distracted, probably figuring- trying to figure out how to spell snooky-ookums, still he sees that our desire is to love him and that desire is practically infinite.

Someone was saying the other day that her niece wrote, saying the following thing: "When you say that Jesus wants to spend time with us every day, part of my insecure self wants to laugh cynically and say, 'Oh, yeah right.' Maybe Jesus wants to spend time with you but not me. But deep down I suppose I'm afraid of Jesus wanting to spend time with me."

Well, chances are that there are many people who would say, 'Well, this is really a nice thought that the Lord wants to spend time with us, but not with me.' And yet, the Lord is a Good Shepherd - is the Good Shepherd for every single one of us. He is passionately loyal, concerned, he is in love with us. It is this realization that led Saint Josemaria to write: "To realize how much you love me Jesus, and yet I have not lost my mind."

Right now in our prayer we can ask St. Josemaria to obtain for us that very same conviction - that conviction that was given to him at a very precise moment in 1931, a moment that that buoyed him, that supported him for the rest of his life.

A thousand years before Jesus, the psalmist wrote in that beloved Psalm 23: "The Lord is my shepherd. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil for thou art with me." God inspired this - the psalmist - to help us to anticipate that love of the ultimate Good Shepherd of Jesus Christ.

As Pope Emeritus Benedict wrote in his three-volume series on Jesus, "Christ is the Good Shepherd who leads us through life's dark valleys. He does not abandon us in this solitude, but leads us out of this valley of death into the green pastures of life - the place of light, happiness, and peace."

We say to the Lord, "Tell me more about this, about what it's like to be guided by the Good Shepherd, compared with the mercenary, the hireling," because after all Jesus in that same

Chapter 10 of John's Gospel warned us about hirelings, about the false mercenary shepherds. They don't really care; they're just doing a job.

He who is a hireling and not a shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, the wolf snatches them and scatters them. A mercenary doesn't care. A mercenary will simply sit idly off to the side watching more or less, but also very distracted. And nothing more even if the sheep are heading towards the edge of a cliff.

We can't let that happen. The reason to put it that way is because we too are called to be good shepherds - good shepherds of those around us. That is why in praying about our Lord about his way of being the Good Shepherd, we're also praying about our own role in the lives of those around us - those especially whom we love.

Jesus did not set off idly off to the side. On the contrary, he, the Good Shepherd, is ferociously loyal. He is determined to help us to grow into the fullness of our humanity. God is very demanding. Jesus really wanted everyone who followed him to grow. Just think of the episode of the rich young man. The Lord loved him, dealt with him with such affection, and yet also pointed the way to those green pastures. He saw that young man waiver and ultimately leave. But the Lord did not back down. He was demanding because he wanted to lead that young man and all of us to the freedom of the truth. That's his way of loving us.

The same thing with those around us. We have to be a good shepherd. That which could get in the way would be some kind of misguided individualism, the fact that each person - they're on their own. You might recall that great Ted Talk given back in Vancouver in 2017. The setting was quite, quite interesting - big auditorium - the first speaker was Elon Musk, the second speaker was Serena Williams, and the third speaker was a mystery speaker. So, you can imagine the anticipation, the suspense, who is this third speaker? And all of a sudden there on the screen: the Holy Father. He said "Buona sera, or whatever time it happens to be where you are right now. Maybe it's 'good morning.'"

But during that talk, which is well worth looking up, he said early on, "Quite a few years of life have strengthened my conviction that each and every one's existence is deeply tied to that of others. Life is not time merely passing by. Life is about interactions."

The Pope went on to say, "I would love it if this meeting could help us to remind us that we all need each other. None of us is an island and autonomous and independent I, separated from the other. We can only build the future by standing together, including everyone. Everything is connected. We need to restore our connections to a healthy state."

This is not an isolated message of the Pope, as you know. In just recently he published *Fratelli Tutti*, which is a meditation on the Good Samaritan. Another image offered to us by the- by our

Lord himself. We have to be good, meaning imitating Jesus Christ in his concern for everyone. Constant concern for souls. That phrase comes from Saint Josemaria. We have to have a constant concern for souls. Souls have to weigh on us, especially when we see so many sheep without a shepherd around us.

One of the most important ways for us to carry out this role of ours of being the good shepherd and really and truly caring for those around us is warning our young ones of dangers. Maybe the mercenary will watch by, sit by idly, as the sheep head towards the edge of a cliff, but we won't do that. We will not sit idly by as we see the young ones heading towards the edge of a cliff, ultimately. We need to strengthen them in the most fundamental areas.

For example, from a very early age, how important it is that we pass on - transmit to them - a life of authentic piety, austerity, strength, resilience, temperance in the use of technology, the capacity for concentration and silence, the spirit of service, loyalty, the virtue of holy purity, generosity, and a whole host of other virtues. This means thinking about it, praying about it, finding those ways to sit down at times and explain things.

Someone was saying in an article recently, quoting a sixteen-year-old girl, who was dumbstruck and quite disappointed when she said as she was heading out the door to go on a date. She said to her father, "I'm going out with so-and-so and I'm not sure, well, when we'll be back. I'm not sure where we're going." And he didn't- did not look up from the newspaper but just said, "Well, have a nice time."

And she said in this article that she was dumbstruck and quite disappointed because she was hoping that he would- he would show interest. And without, she didn't put it this way but we can, that he would act as the Good Shepherd.

Well finally, ways in which Jesus Christ continually exercises his role as the Good Shepherd. The first place, he feeds us he nourishes us with his own body. He's not just a Shepherd, but he is also the food - he is the true pasture. As Pope Emeritus Benedict puts it, "He gives life by giving himself, for he is life." That is why it is so important that we love the Eucharist, that we explain to the young ones why, if anyone were to try to prevent us from going to mass, from receiving the Eucharist as often as possible, they would risk getting run over because we need to be fed.

We also need to be healed. After all, the Good Shepherd heals the wounds of his sheep. We go to the Good Shepherd through the sacrament of penance. It is there where the Good Shepherd speaks to us, forgives us, deals with us with such with such Divine tenderness because he loves us.

And he speaks to us the truth. Just as he said to the woman caught in adultery, "Go and sin no more." And we, having been restored by that brief encounter in the confessional, we really and truly feel restored, loved. We feel loved in a very personal, individual way because the Lord says to us, "I forgive *you*," singular, "*your* sins."

Well, let us finish our time of prayer with great gratitude. How wonderful it is to realize that even as we finished this time of prayer the Lord himself is looking at us, beaming, because he loves to see us pray about him, contemplating his role as our Good Shepherd, rejoicing in the fact that we are loved so effectively, so thoroughly, so infinitely by him.

I thank you my God for the good resolutions, affections, and inspirations that you have communicated to me in this meditation. I ask your help in putting them into effect. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph my father and Lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. God bless each and every one of you.



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