Episode: Letting Go and Letting God: Following the Good Shepherd

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Podcast Page: https://stjosemaria.org/podcasts/good-shepherd/

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.

In the Ordinary Time of the year, we consider how Jesus guides us as the Good Shepherd and through the flow of time, through the course of history. And we can meditate on these words, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one.”

So, in the Old Testament, in the Psalms, we all know how lovely the Psalm 23 is, “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for you are with me; Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies; Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

The people of Israel were speaking as a people. They trusted in God's guidance in the vicissitudes of their political history, but also in their personal life. But Jesus applies it to each one of us, and he asks us to listen to his voice. To hear his voice, and this closeness to Jesus, this faith in him, this holding on to him, is what grants us eternal life- that starts on this earth. It’s not just a promise for after our death.

But all anxiety, all feelings of being overwhelmed, all problems and concerns we might have - we must hand them over to him. He is our shepherd. And in these events of our life, we can hear his gentle, tender voice - which is not the same as being nice. "Nice" means not causing pain to anyone else. But "kindness" is a strong help, a strong attitude to reach holiness. And therefore, the Lord is kind, but sometimes he can’t be “nice” in the sense of avoiding all suffering for us.

St. Josemaria had a great devotion to the Good Shepherd. In the very beginning of *Friends of God*, he says, "I remember, many years ago now, I was going along a road in Castile with some friends, when we noticed something in a field far away which made a deep impression on me at the time and has since often helped me in my prayer. A group of men were hammering some wooden stakes into the ground, which they then used to support netting to form a sheep pen. Then shepherds came along with their sheep and their lambs. They called them by their names and one by one lambs and sheep went into the pen, where they would be all together, safe and sound.

Today, Lord, my thoughts go back specially to those shepherds and their sheepfold, because all of us who are gathered here to converse with you — and many others the world over — we all know that we have been brought into your sheepfold. You yourself have told us so: 'I am the Good Shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me.' You know us well. You know that we wish to hear, to listen ever attentively to your gentle whistling as our Good Shepherd, and to heed it, because 'eternal life is knowing you, who are the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent'.

The image of Christ with his sheep at his right and left means so much to me that I had it depicted in the oratory where I normally celebrate Holy Mass. Elsewhere, as a reminder of God's presence, I have had engraved Jesus' words, c*ognosco oves meas et cognoscunt me meae*, to help us consider constantly that he is at our side, reproaching us, instructing us and teaching us as does a shepherd with his flock." (*Friends of God,* no. 1)

So it's about listening to his voice - listening with attention, with humility, with openness - and not hardening our hearts when we hear his voice, even if it doesn't seem to be what we wanted or planned. It's an attitude of letting go. In America, there's this saying, "To let go and to let God." To let God act, because we have let go of the things we hold on to.

We have a new pope - Leo XIV - who, when he came out on the balcony, the first thing he said was: "For you, I am Pastor, but with you, I am Christian." He was quoting St. Augustine, who inspired the Augustinians. And there are two main rules in the Church for monastic life: one is the Rule of St. Benedict, and the other is the Rule of St. Augustine. And uh, so in the 11th and 12th centuries, the Rule of St. Augustine was revived by the religious renewal of the time, it, emphasizing the need to work and already in this world to give witness in this world to the life of the future world, according to the laws of heaven.

Turning again to St. Josemaria, speaking of the Good Shepherd, he said, "Allow me to give you a piece of advice. If ever you lose the clear light, always turn to the Good Shepherd. And who is the Good Shepherd? 'He who enters by the door' of faithfulness to the Church's doctrine and does not act like the hireling 'who sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees'; whereupon 'the wolf snatches them and scatters them.' Reflect on these divine words, which are not said in vain, and on the insistence of Christ who so affectionately speaks of shepherds and sheep, of sheepfold and flock, as a practical proof of the need that our soul has of good guidance.

'If there be no bad shepherds,' says St Augustine speaking about the Good Shepherd, 'he would not have described the hireling, who sees the wolf and flees. He seeks his own glory, not Christ's glory. He does not dare to rebuke sinners with freedom of spirit. The wolf catches a sheep by the neck, the devil induces a man to commit adultery. And you are silent and do not rebuke. Then you are a hireling because you have seen the wolf and have fled. Perhaps you might say: No, I'm here, I haven't fled. I answer: You have fled because you have been silent, and you have been silent because you were afraid'" (*Christ is Passing By*, no. 32).

These are the words of St. Augustine, and the quote ends here. That's a call to our own responsibility to be good shepherds of our brothers and sisters. We are sheep in the sheepfold, but we are also shepherds. And we need to practice fraternal correction. We need to give advice with sincerity, and overcoming timidity and shyness when it is necessary.

So um, we think especially of Pope Leo XIV who, on the Sunday of the Good Shepherd, he said a Mass at the tomb of St. Peter. And what came to his mind there was to pray for vocations, to pray for others who are good shepherds, and uh who have a missionary spirit, an apostolic spirit, who really themselves seek holiness.

So this really resonates with what St. Josemaria always said: that the aim of Opus Dei is personal holiness and apostolate. Being a good shepherd means walking with the flock. It doesn't mean sitting at home and pressing buttons. But it means getting dirty - smelling of the sheep, as Pope Francis used to say - going out in search of those who have gone lost.

But most of all, it means to persevere in our vocation, to be faithful. And we all have bad moments. We have ups and downs. We have times where things go easily, and others where we don't feel like doing anything or we feel discouraged. And but it's a truth that just by being faithful - faithful in our life of piety, faithful in the fulfillment of our duties, in patience, and without exaggerating the difficulties but trusting in the Lord - we save thousands of souls.

Or rather, God uses us, unbeknownst to ourselves, to do things in others that we don't even foresee. Somebody told me a story some time ago of a woman who had become a Catholic because she was watching the funeral of President John F. Kennedy on television. And next to his coffin, there was a woman who made the sign of the cross. And that simple gesture of faith, of Catholic faith, struck her so deeply, and kept on working in your soul and in her memory that years later, she decided to become Catholic.

Of course, the woman who was making the sign of the cross had no notion or no idea of this other person watching her on television, but it was her courage to show her faith in that situation that had this effect. So we don't know how God wants to use us. But we do know that he wants us to be faithful and to persevere. "My God," says St. Josemaria, "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" (*The Forge*, no. 319).

God loves us individually. St. Paul says that God loved me and gave himself for me. He didn't give himself for a whole anonymous mass of people, but incredibly and inexplicably, God loved me. And he loved me into existence. And he keeps on loving me as if I were the only human being on Earth. Thank you, Lord, for your great love, for your vocation, for wanting me to be close to you. Let me be faithful. Let me let go. Let me let God. You- let- you use me as your instrument for what you want.

I have my plans and my ideas and my wishes. But I surrender them to you. I trust in you. I trust that you will do something better and bigger than what I plan. Maybe I'm like a fisherman in a boat with a tiny net, and I'm all happy throwing out this tiny net. And God comes and places it in a much larger net - and tears my small net - because it's an obstacle. And now all of a sudden, there's a much bigger net, a much greater efficiency than I could have ever imagined.

So Lord, you are the Good Shepherd. And I want to listen to you. And there are moments – and I think we all know them from personal experience, where we are deaf. And we need to approach Jesus and ask him for healing. There's the healing of the deaf mute in the Gospel, which is so beautiful and fits into our daily life. "Again he left the district of Tyre and went by way of Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, into the district of the Decapolis. And people brought to him a deaf man who had a speech impediment and begged him to lay his hand on him. He took him off by himself, away from the crowd. He put his finger into the man's ears and, spitting, touched his tongue. Then he looked up to heaven and groaned and said to him, '*Ephphatha'*, that is, 'Be opened.' And immediately, the man's ears were opened, his speech impediment was removed, and he spoke plainly. He ordered them not to tell anyone. But the more he ordered them not to, the more they proclaimed it. They were exceedingly astonished and said, 'He has done all things well. He makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.'"

Lord, speak to me through these words, and let me apply them in my own life, in my work, in my apostolate, in the spiritual direction I receive, in the advice I get, in confession. So, there's this man who can't hear, and unsurprisingly, he can't speak properly. He probably was able to make noises or can – he couldn't hear what he was saying, he might have learned to speak as a child if he lost his hearing after some years as a child. We don't know. But in any case, he couldn't communicate with others. But he had people who loved him and who brought him to Jesus. The crowd wants Jesus to do something specific. They don't ask him to do what he later does. But they have a center plan that they want him to fulfill – which is to put your hands on him. But Jesus doesn't do that. He takes the man away from the noise, from the shouting, the requests. And I think that's a good lesson: first of all, to surrender our plans to Jesus.

We sometimes want to make God do our plans, to fulfill our plans, to follow our playbook and, and, and Jesus changes that and, and the other lesson we can learn is that the best way we can help others is to pray for them and to remove ourselves from the crowd, from whatever we're doing and just entrust people in trust to Jesus.

And then Jesus puts his finger into the man's ears, so he places his finger on our wounds. So, this is your problem. This is your problem. It's not something else, you know, it's this is your problem. And actually, by putting his fingers in the ears of the man, it's like making it worse, because he can hear even less. He could hear even less by that but, but so it's again, letting Jesus do in our lives and accepting where the Good Shepherd tells us, "This, this is your problem. It's not what you think it is," Or, "This is your gift," to put it positively.

And it takes time for us to cut through all our emotional confusion. There's so many layers of emotions. We react with anger because we were weak, and then we were weak because there was this other thing, or whatever. So, there are these layers, and sometimes we stick. We get stuck in the first layer. We just think we need to fight against emotions, you know? And so, we do encounter people who talk a lot, who make many words because they think they can find peace and consolation, but, but they but they don't, because they don't really know what their problem is. And they don't know because they, they don't listen.

They, they- so Lord, lay your hands on where I need it. Indicate to me through others or directly in prayer where I need healing. And then Jesus touches the other man's tongue with his own saliva, with his tongue. So that means that he had to come very near. And again, the man let Jesus do, and it's at this gesture is- this is a gesture of tenderness. It's like a mother who does that with her baby. I've- we even have seen mothers pre-chew the food they gave the they give their infant. And so immediately, the man's ears were opened and he could speak plainly.

You know, it's not easy to say what or to formulate what our real problem is. This is one of the big difficulties for being sincere. It's even when we want to be sincere. It's like, “Well, I don't know what, what, what is going on? I can't- I have a speech impediment. I can't formulate it clearly. I don't know myself what it is.” So again, then what we what we do is we try to describe it. It would be very strange for us to go to a doctor and tell him, “I have so and so,” and to give him the full diagnosis with Latin or Greek expressions and then tell him and, “You have to prescribe for me this or that new pharmaceutical product.” And, well, we don't do that. We go and say, “Doctor, I have a headache, or I'm not feeling well, and I don't know what it is,” and then it's the doctor's job to find out.

So, speaking without impediment just is a capacity to express. Ourselves, and that is not easy. That's not that, but first is always listening without jumping to conclusions. And if that is true of ourselves, it is even truer of others. We tend to be very quick in our judgments of others, like I like him or I don't like him, or I like this person, or I don't like this person. And well, have I bothered to talk with him or her? Have I have I listened? Have I entered into their own lives? Can I, am I able to understand what they are telling me? And we will react if we do that, if we ask Jesus, and we do so now.

Jesus, give me a heart that is conformed to your heart. Give me the love with which you want me to love you give me the love with much with which you want me to love others. Give me the heart of a Good Shepherd. When you arrived tired, and you had promised the apostles a short vacation alone with them, and they hadn't even eaten yet, and you arrive on the other side of the lake, you see this, this crowd, and you were moved by pity and compassion and mercy, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. They, they, they were anxious, lost, dirty and hungry and you console them, you- you're kind, you're strong. Again, it's not just being nice, but it's being the Good Shepherd.

And so give me that same heart and use me as your instrument, as your loudspeaker, as you wish. You know, maybe I'm just the saliva which is necessary to open another person's tongue, figuratively speaking. And it's or like the mud you produce, Lord when you spit on the ground, and you take this mud and you can spread it on the eyes of the blind man and tell him to go and wash in a well on the other side of the city. You know and so, and it's washed away.

Maybe that's what you want- you meet- you want to use me for. And so give me that love so that I can help others. And the first visit outside of the Vatican for XIV was to a Shrine of Our Lady, the Shrine of Good Counsel, which he had visited as a Cardinal. It's a shrine that is entrusted to the Augustinians, and he prayed for his new ministry. So, he has been giving us clear signs that God comes first. Mass comes first. He prayed at the tomb of his predecessor, Francis. He prayed at the tomb of St. Peter, whose successor he is. And he went to Mary. He went to our mother. So, Jesus, you are our Good Shepherd. You guide us everywhere, and there's nothing we shall want. We can trust in you. And you carry us on our- on your shoulders. You heal us when, when we need it, anoint us with your joy and Mary, *causa nostrae laetitiae*, cause of our joy. Pray for us.