

The True Shepherd Who Stays With Us



Make yourself available to Jesus and discover what He's got for you...

by DEACON JIM MCFADDEN

Mick Jagger of the *Rolling Stones* once plaintively sang: "We all need someone to lean on." Given his atheistic disposition, I don't think he knew why that's true, but he was on to something. We're hardwired 'to lean on' someone

because we are at our very core relational beings made in the image of a communitarian God. Given that, John's Gospel of the Good Shepherd describes the kind of relationship God wants to have with us. He is the one we can lean on.

Voice of the Shepherd

John presents our Lord Jesus as the True Shepherd of the People of God. As such, the relationship that binds Jesus to us, the sheep of His flock, is truly unique. To begin with, the relationship is one of mutual recognition. We hear: "My sheep hear My voice; I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life, and they never perish. No one can take them out of My hand." (John 10:27-28)

First, the sheep—that's us—hear the voice of the shepherd. Notice the sequence: God takes the initiative. Always! Everything



† “Come to Me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.” Matthew 11:28

starts from His grace; it is He who calls us into an intimate relationship. But this communion only comes about if we open ourselves to Him and listen. If we're deaf, if we're absorbed by the white noise of our frenetic society, then He cannot give us this shared life. So, we have to intentionally listen, which means being available. But, are we? Do we dedicate time to regularly dialogue with Him? Today we are so bombarded by a tsunami of words through television and the internet that it's really hard to have a genuine conversation. If we can't listen to each other, we probably won't listen to God either.

But if we're going to be in a genuine relationship with God, we have to be good listeners because Jesus is the Word of God spoken by the Father, which means the Word is meant to be heard, to be received. That's why a baptized Christian is a listening child of God, and we're called to live with the Word of God. So, let's ask ourselves: do I find time for the Word of God; do I know how to listen to Him? And, if we do, do we have the sense that God is actively listening

to us when we pray, when we pour our hearts out to Him, when we call upon Him?

Listen and Discover

As we listen to Jesus, we will gradually discover that He knows us: the Lord knows His sheep. Not in the informational sense, but in the biblical sense of knowing the other: of loving the other as a thou. This means that the Lord, while He reads our inner being, loves us. Yes, we are sinners, but we are forgiven sinners, and He still loves us anyway because that is what love does. If we listen to the

Lord, we will know that we are being loved. Thus, our relationship with Him will not be impersonal or abstract. As the True Shepherd, Jesus seeks a warm friendship that is characterized by trust, intimacy, and mutual self-giving.

Love or Imitate?

Sometimes when the walls are starting to cave in and everything seems



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dark, we need to hit the pause button and reflect that right here, right now, I am being intentionally loved by the Good Shepherd and that He will never abandon me. No matter what we are going through in all our sufferings, difficulties, crises, and darkness, Jesus sustains us by going through them with us. He's not

just observing what we're undergoing from a heavenly distance, but He accompanies us as we slog through this life. Thus, it is precisely during troubled times that we can discover just how much we are known and loved by the Lord. So, let us ask ourselves: Do I allow Jesus to know me? Do I make room for Him in my life? Do I bring what I am experiencing to Him? If we do, then we will experience His closeness. The Lord is near because He is the Good Shepherd.

Finally, the sheep who hear and who discover that they are known will follow the Good Shepherd. What does that mean? Simply put, they go where He goes, along His Way, in the same direction, which ultimately leads to our destination: Heaven. And as we do, we will imitate our

Lord, we will seek those who are lost; we will take interest in those who have drifted away; we will take to heart those who are suffering; we will weep with those who are weeping, and we will reach out to our neighbors, carrying them on our shoulders.

So, getting down to the nitty-gritty: do I let Jesus love me? And, if so, do I begin to love Him, to imitate Him?



DEACON JIM MCFADDEN ministers at Saint John the Baptist Catholic Church in Folsom, California. He serves in adult faith formation, St. Vincent DePaul Society/Loaves and Fishes, and spiritual direction.

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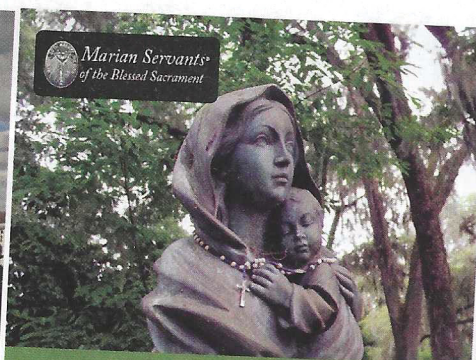


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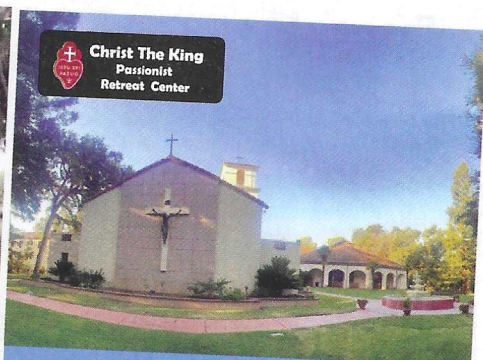
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