

- One of the earliest paintings of Christ in the Roman catacombs depicts Jesus as carrying an injured lamb on his shoulders...an image which touches the heart.
- But why does that image touch us so? Because it is an image of God's tenderness...His compassion...His love for each of us.
- And we know that on the shepherd's shoulders we are carried to a place of care, of security and of good pasture...where there will be nothing I shall want...where He restoreth my soul...as Psalm 23 reminds us.
- God always seeks for us when we stray too far, and His voice constantly reaches out to us.
- How many times have we already felt his love and grace calling us back to the flock when we have strayed?
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- But we, like sheep, sometimes wander from the care of the shepherd...lured away by attractive, but poisonous, weeds.
- Yet the person who thinks he can do without God's revelation and the Church quickly falls prey to those who would consume him.
- Jesus' "flock" is constantly exposed to danger...
- ...wolves harassing the flock with promises of happiness without God...trusting in momentary but destructive physical or prideful pleasures rather than on the joy which comes solely from fulfillment of the spirit.
- "Sex, drugs and rock & roll!"...until they OD, or die of AIDS because of promiscuity, or rob relatives blind for drugs...teeth falling out from meth, or dumping kids on their parents to raise, or until they're behind bars or have killed a child while driving drunk.
- These are all too familiar (and predictable) manifestations of leaving the guidance of the Good Shepherd.

- You young people especially: realize that you are not immune to the wolf's teeth.
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- Or thieves who steal sheep away from the flock...luring them with tempting bait...ridiculing the flock and telling them how foolish they are to believe in the wisdom of this 2000-year-old Church established by Jesus.
- And then there are the hirelings who abandon the flock at the sign of danger or tribulation...who simply worry about their own pay and comfort and ease of life...viewing the flock as simply as job security or an opportunity for recognition, rather than that of being theirs and God's true servant.
- "I won't teach them the truth; they don't like it. I'll tickle their ears with what is popular in the world."

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- But Jesus is the True and Good Shepherd; the flock is His, and He cares for it with deep love.
  - A Good Shepherd guides the flock in Truth...guiding them to healthy pastures of God's love, and standing between His flock and the wolves.
  - Jesus has already given His life for the flock...and gave it freely so that the flock might truly live...as He says in our Gospel today:  
*"No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down on my own."*

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- There is an old story about French soldier in WWI whose arm was so mangled that it had to be amputated...and the surgeon was very sad that the soldier had to go through the rest of his life maimed.
  - When the young man awoke, the surgeon said to him: "I am so sorry to tell you that you have lost your arm."

- But the soldier simply replied: “Sir, I did not lose it. I gave it—for France!”
  - Even more so, Jesus sacrificed His life for love of US in reparation for sin that we might live with God.
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- And now...as His disciples, we are called to be shepherds to those around us...to give our lives for those who have not yet found the True Shepherd.
- We are called to go out to guide them...not just priests and deacons and bishops, but every one of you!
- We, like Jesus, are given strength and courage through God’s grace to go out to the world...confident in His Words to us at the end of the Gospel of Matthew: “*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.*” (Matt 28:19-20 RSV)
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- We are now the body of Christ; we are now His hands to work, His feet to travel the dusty road, His voice to proclaim His Gospel to the world.
- We are sent forth by grace given to us in the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and especially the Eucharist, to go out and reflect His light to those around us—not only to family and friends, but also to co-workers, to non-Catholics, to non-Christians, to all we have yet to come to know Him.
- The weekly Mass...the Eucharist...is to energize us to once again go out and bring His Word to the world.
- The Latin dismissal of the Mass is “Ite, missa est!”, meaning “Go; you are sent!”...sent out to bring others to Christ.
- The Good News—the Gospel—is NOT our private property...but, like love, it is meant to be shared.

- A Christian...a Catholic...is not one for himself alone, but is to draw others to the joy of Christ...to the security and knowledge of God's goodness and His salvation.
  - What shall we say before the throne of God? "Well...I made sure I looked after myself? I made sure that I would want for nothing?" Perish the thought!
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- The very essence of our faith...of Christianity...is to love God and love neighbor, even to the exclusion of self...and there is NO greater love of both God and neighbor than to bring others to Christ.
- Be that spring for of grace others, that they may seek and find the very source of grace.
- Comfort the lonely and the sorrowing...help those around you in whatever need you may find them...whether it be physical OR spiritual. Overlook the little pinprick slights and offenses against yourself. Be that light of Christ.
- Selflessness is the perfect life...and by living that life, we motivate others to strive for that same ultimate goal.
- It is in living that selfless and Godly life that we become most like Christ...and how we truly become children of God.

Reading 1

[Acts 4:8-12](#)

Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said:  
"Leaders of the people and elders:  
If we are being examined today  
about a good deed done to a cripple,  
namely, by what means he was saved,  
then all of you and all the people of Israel should know  
that it was in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazorean  
whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead;  
in his name this man stands before you healed.  
He is *the stone rejected by you, the builders,  
which has become the cornerstone.*  
There is no salvation through anyone else,  
nor is there any other name under heaven  
given to the human race by which we are to be saved."

Responsorial Psalm

[Ps 118:1, 8-9, 21-23, 26, 28, 29](#)

R. (22) **The stone rejected by the builders has become the cornerstone.**

or:

R. **Alleluia.**

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good,  
for his mercy endures forever.

It is better to take refuge in the LORD  
than to trust in man.

It is better to take refuge in the LORD  
than to trust in princes.

R. **The stone rejected by the builders has become the cornerstone.**

or:

R. **Alleluia.**

I will give thanks to you, for you have answered me  
and have been my savior.

The stone which the builders rejected  
has become the cornerstone.

By the LORD has this been done;  
it is wonderful in our eyes.

R. **The stone rejected by the builders has become the cornerstone.**

or:

R. **Alleluia.**

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD;  
we bless you from the house of the LORD.

I will give thanks to you, for you have answered me

and have been my savior.

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;  
for his kindness endures forever.

**R. The stone rejected by the builders has become the cornerstone.**

or:

**R. Alleluia.**

Reading II

[1 Jn 3:1-2](#)

Beloved:

See what love the Father has bestowed on us  
that we may be called the children of God.

Yet so we are.

The reason the world does not know us  
is that it did not know him.

Beloved, **we are God's children now;**  
**what we shall be has not yet been revealed.**

We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like him,  
for we shall see him as he is.

Gospel

[Jn 10:11-18](#)

Jesus said:

"I am the good shepherd.

**A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.**

A hired man, who is not a shepherd  
and whose sheep are not his own,  
sees a wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away,  
and the wolf catches and scatters them.

This is because he works for pay and has no concern for the sheep.

I am the good shepherd,  
and I know mine and mine know me,  
just as the Father knows me and I know the Father;  
and I will lay down my life for the sheep.

**I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold.**  
**These also I must lead, and they will hear my voice,**  
**and there will be one flock, one shepherd.**

This is why the Father loves me,  
because I lay down my life in order to take it up again.

**No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own.**

I have power to lay it down, and power to take it up again.

This command I have received from my Father."