

There was once a Shakespearean actor who was known everywhere for his one-man shows of readings and recitations from the classics. He would always end his performance with a dramatic reading of Psalm 23.

Each night, without exception, as the actor began his recitation - "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want"...the crowd would listen attentively. And then, at the conclusion of the Psalm, they would rise in thunderous applause in appreciation of the actor's incredible ability to bring the verse to life.

But one night, just before the actor was to offer his customary recital of Psalm 23, a young man from the audience spoke up. "Sir, do you mind if tonight I recite Psalm 23?" The actor was quite taken back by this unusual request, but he allowed the young man to come forward and stand front and center on the stage to recite the Psalm, knowing that the ability of this unskilled youth would be no match for his own talent.

With a soft voice, the young man began to recite the words of the Psalm. When he was finished, there was no applause. There was no standing ovation as on other nights. All that could be heard was the sound of weeping. The audience had been so moved by the young man's recitation that every eye was full of tears. Amazed by what he had heard, the actor said to the youth, "I don't understand. I have been performing Psalm 23 for years. I have a lifetime of experience and training - but I have never been able to move an audience as you have tonight. Tell me, what is your secret?"

The young man quietly replied, "Well sir, you know the Psalm... I know the Shepherd." You know the Psalm, but I know the Shepherd.

Growing up, the only time that I heard the 23rd Psalm was at funerals. I never really paid attention to the words.

Then one time, I was really afraid. I had this dreadful feeling that evil was taking over my house. It was a very real, very deep and dark fear.

I hadn't really paid attention to the words of the Shepherd's psalm, and not really growing up reading the Bible didn't actually know that it was the 23rd psalm, but through the grace of God, I picked up my bible and opened immediately to, yes, you guessed it, Psalm 23. When I reached the verse that says, "My house, the house of the Lord for as long as I shall live", I repeated it over and over again.

It began take away all of the angst and fear that I had. My house is a house where God dwells. Nothing evil can ever happen when I claimed my house as God's house.

The Lord is our shepherd. Jesus reveals himself in the imagery of a shepherd who cares deeply for His sheep. He is with them night and day to lead them in safe paths, to guide them to fresh running water, to make sure that they have pastures to graze on and to basically protect them from wild animals, thieves and robbers and in all aspects of their lives. He knows them by name and they know His voice and put all their trust in Him.

All throughout the bible, God is shown as being a shepherd of His people. One of my favorite passages is Ezekiel 34:11-16

'For thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out "As a shepherd cares for his flock in the day when he is among his scattered sheep, so I will care for My sheep and will deliver them from all the places to which they were scattered on a cloudy and gloomy day." I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and bring them to their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the streams, and in all the inhabited places of the land." I will feed them in a good pasture, and their grazing ground will be on the mountain heights of Israel." I will feed My flock and I will lead them to rest," declares the Lord GOD. "I will seek the lost, bring back the scattered, bind up the broken and strengthen the sick.

This isn't something that happened once and is over, Our Shepherd protects us from all harm and leads the way today and even though we sometimes stray from that way, He is always there to carry us back and start again.

He entrusted Peter to feed His sheep, to carry on the task of shepherd on earth, to lead others in the path of Jesus. And that task has been handed on through the years.

In our society when we think of shepherding, a peaceful, quiet scene usually appears in our mind. We see rolling hills, dry stone walls, beautiful streams in a verdant pasture. This would actually be quite different with scriptural representations.

In Scripture, the shepherd is a figure who is associated with authority and violence, and the task of shepherding is one beset by dangers on every side. The shepherd must drive away or kill predators, bandits, thieves, and navigate hostile terrain. The Good Shepherd suffers violent death for the sake of his flock.

Brothers and sisters, our God is with us always and always. He is a fierce protector of His children, His sheep, and will, as John said, never leave us orphans to fend for ourselves.

Good Shepherd Sunday always falls on the Fourth Sunday of Easter. I thought it very appropriate that Mother's Day is being celebrated on this day also.

Sermon Easter 4C
Our Shepherd will always protect us
May 12th, 2019

I've often thought of mothers as fierce, protective, Loving shepherds. Think of it for a moment. Mothers will do anything to protect their children. They always try to make their children comfortable and secure. A Mom can pick her child's voice out of a crowded playground with tons of yelling children and the child knows his mother's voice. As the child grows up the mother teaches her about Jesus and the love He has for us.

We celebrated the Feast Dame Julian of Norwich on Wednesday. As I prepared to celebrate the Liturgy, I read some of the revelations that she had from Jesus. One of them said,

"It is a characteristic of God to overcome evil with good.

Jesus Christ therefore, who himself overcame evil with good, is our true Mother. We received our 'Being' from Him and this is where His Maternity starts And with it comes the gentle Protection and Guard of Love which will never ceases to surround us. Just as God is our Father, so God is also our Mother.

In our Gospel Reading this morning, Jesus reassures us with the words, "My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish."