

There's a story, about a renowned actor who was invited to a social function in England. He recited Shakespeare and all sorts of beautiful poetry. When he was finished, he asked if anyone had any requests.

An elderly priest stood up and asked, "Could you please recite the 23<sup>rd</sup> psalm?" The actor replied: "Yes, Father, as long as you agree to recite it after I've finished."

The priest agreed reluctantly. Then the actor recited the psalm perfectly. The audience was spellbound and all stood and applauded when he had finished.

Soon, the old priest stood up, and began to slowly recite the psalm. **His** voice cracked from years of ministry, and **his** words were not perfectly pronounced. When **he** finished and sat down, there was no applause...only silence...and teary eyes...and bowed heads.

After a moment, the actor rose to his feet, and with great emotion said, "Friends...I have reached your eyes and ears. But this priest has reached your hearts. **I** know the **psalm** of the Good Shepherd - but **he** knows the Shepherd!"

Our readings today are about earthly and heavenly shepherds.

In our first reading we're told "woe to the shepherds who mislead and scatter the flock of my pasture, says the Lord." This was a pointed reference from Jerimiah to the kings of Israel who had overseen the downfall and exile of God's Chosen People.

But this passage also carries a promise of hope: "Behold the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up a righteous shoot to David; as king he shall reign and govern wisely...In **His** days, Judah shall be saved, Israel shall dwell in security."

This last prophesy is the foretelling of a Good Shepherd who will fulfill God's covenant with His people. This coming shepherd **will** tend his sheep, feed and watch over them; defend them from danger; lead them to good pastures and water; and sacrifice himself for them, putting their comfort ahead of His own comfort and safety.

Paul's message to the Ephesians is that Jesus *is* the very shepherd promised by Jerimiah and it's only through Him that Jews and gentiles can unite and have true peace.

Then Mark **introduces** us to this Good Shepherd from the perspective of the people on the shore and the apostles in the boat.

The people on the shore wanted to know Jesus. The apostles in the boat who already knew and followed Him wanted to report how the news was received on their mission journey that the Kingdom of God was at hand.

Physically, the only thing separating that crowd from Jesus was the water between the boat and the shore. The only thing standing in the way of the apostles fully knowing Jesus, was recognizing what Paul knew and had shared with the Ephesians in the second reading...that in addition to Jesus being the Good Shepherd, He was also the Lamb of God.

Spiritually, the only thing separating us from Jesus is the water of baptism, and accepting the responsibility that comes with it. That responsibility is not **just** to be a lamb who follows Christ, but rather **a shepherd** who brings others to Him.

As the example of that old priest so eloquently pointed out, we can't follow Christ, let alone bring others to Him, unless and until we know and love Jesus personally, and that can only happen through prayer, suffering and reflection, which by the way, was where Jesus and the apostles were headed in that boat.

You and I may know success, well-being and comfort. We may know fun times, how to cook or how to balance a checkbook. We may know how to play sports or invest in the stock market. We probably know our spouses, family and friends...but the truth is: *we don't really know anything if we don't know the Good Shepherd*...and that's a hard message to convey in a society that's more focused on following the money than following the shepherd who gives us life and hope.

That old priest who recited Psalm 23 knew from experience that his Lord would never leave him wanting. He knew that with the Good Shepherd, he'd find true peace...even if he walked in the valley of darkness. He feared no evil because he knew that GOD was always at his side.

And I suspect he knew that every person who heard him recite that psalm **needed** the Good Shepherd in the same way, whether they realized it or not, just like we need Him.

And the good news in our gospel today is that Jesus leaves no sheep behind. He wants every one of us, even those who are lost...and in our readings over the next few weeks, you'll learn just how much. So remember, if the Lord is YOUR shepherd, there is nothing you shall want...so get to know him and sing of the Lord's goodness.