

4th Sunday Easter Year "C"  
May 7-8, 2022

*Humble Flock and Brave Shepherds*

Readings: Acts 5:27-32,40-41; Revelation 7:14-17; John 10:27-30

This weekend is traditionally called Good Shepherd Sunday. Without doubt, the image of the shepherd is one of the most enduring in all the Scriptures, because it resonates with us. For many priests, it is our favorite image for ministry. When we know that you are praying for us, it only strengthens our resolve to be shepherds after the heart of Christ.

In the Book of Revelation, we heard that it is the Lamb who will shepherd the people, leading them to springs of life-giving water, wiping away the tears from their eyes. Both the Shepherd and the Lamb are images for Jesus Christ, each in its own way. Especially in times of critical difficulties, we must turn towards the Good Shepherd for guidance. One day we will stand before God's Throne, making an account of our life.

Did we trust the shepherd's word, even when it challenged us— in fact, especially when it challenged us? We all have our concerns about our families, our jobs, the economy and even the Church. In such times, we are called to trust and the Church is called to lead. Our Opening Prayer implored that the "humble flock may reach where the brave shepherd has gone before. Not just a shepherd, but a brave one. The Latin Missal uses the words *humilitas* and *fortitudo* here. *Humble* flock and *brave* shepherds.

A Good Shepherd has as a priority both to seek the lost sheep and courageously lead the flock. Neither the shepherd nor the sheep can give into despair. Jesus the Good Shepherd never ceases to go after his lost sheep. Nor should we, including those whose views on the issue of innocent life in the womb are diametrically opposed to ours.

I was just nine years old when *Roe v. Wade* became the law of the land in 1973. Our pastor invited people to stay after Mass, as he explained the ruling. We stayed, and while too young to grasp the complexities, I knew this much: some babies were not even allowed to be born. I was stunned.

By God's grace and a solid upbringing, I've never wavered in my commitment to the pro-life movement, even if I have felt I should be doing more. I taught high school religion for over a decade and realized that highlighting the role of fetology was a necessity. Ultrasound images make it extremely difficult to maintain that a fetus a merely a blob of cells.

I distinctly recall a senior in High School who proudly expressed his pro-choice views in class. When we watched a video showing an ultrasound, he made a rather sarcastic gesture and put his head down, signaling he would not even deign to watch. In that precise moment, I prayed and immediately thought to myself- "I think he just changed his mind."

Fast forward five years later; he was now a recent college graduate. I ran into him at some event. After exchanging pleasantries, he said, "Father, I want you to know something. I'm pro-life now. Thank you!" That was it...nothing more needed to be said. Never give up on someone; never lose your cool, never lose patience. At the same time, do not remain silent. Offer a powerful witness, but by means of your love.

Hatred never wins; anger never helps. Passion is necessary, tempered by good judgment and overflowing with love. It is love that will bring out the truth, and truth will eventually triumph. Know that a draft is **not** a final decision. No decision has yet been rendered by the Court. I have been praying for nearly a half century for this decision to be overturned.

The USCCB Committee on Pro-Life Activities issued a call to prayer: "As Catholics, we care about every unborn child and every mother. Our Church has consistently witnessed in word and deed that life begins at the moment of conception...as we await the Court's decision, we urge everyone to intensify their prayer and fasting that the final decision of the Court will bring about the reversal of *Roe* and *Casey*."<sup>1</sup> Notice, prayer **and** fasting. When I began to fast for pro-life, it changed my spiritual life.

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<sup>1</sup> Call to Prayer statement of Archbishop William Lori, chair of the USCCB Committee on Pro-Life Activities, 4 May 2022.

Now is the time for courage. Now is the time for witness. We are the sheep of the Lord's flock. We listen and follow, not counting the cost. Pray for the strength to remain steadfast and confident in your ability to witness to the sanctity of life. Fundamental to that witness is a willingness to help and support women in need; that is not an optional piece.

In this critical moment, the Church pledges to “redouble our efforts to accompany women and couples who are facing unexpected or difficult pregnancies, and during the early years of parenthood, offering them loving and compassionate care.”<sup>2</sup>

In today's first reading, both Paul and Barnabas were unflinching in their zeal and desire to share the truth of Jesus Christ. They noted that when the members of the synagogue rejected that teaching, they turned to the Gentiles. They did not allow the rejection of their message to deter or discourage them; they pressed forward. Even after they were expelled, the scriptures notes, “disciples were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.” Imagine that—how could they retain their joy after just getting the boot?

Such peace of mind only emanates from those who are in union with the Lord, those who trust that God is in charge. It is never about us; it is about remaining faithful in season and out, it is about proclaiming truth in love, with joy, zeal and at times, with the help of the virtue of courage.

On Mother's Day weekend, we pray for all moms and mothers to be. We stand by our mothers; we honor your fundamental vocation and pledge to help those in need. May the Blessed Mother watch over all mothers on this and every day. And may Jesus, gentle shepherd, lead us safely home.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, USCCB Statement of May 4, 2022.