

Ask Fr James

Please explain the Image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd

In the Catholic Church, we have several Christological images that helps us to pray to Jesus. Amongst the several sacred images we deploy in prayer are the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Christ the King, Christ the Divine Mercy and Christ the Good Shepherd. Devotions to these Sacred Images of Jesus has been part of Christian history and several religious orders and congregations were founded to dedicate themselves and their charism to these aspects of Jesus' life.

The image of Jesus the Good Shepherd is one of the most favoured and popular representation of Christ in Christendom. It is an image or painting which depict the Good Shepherd standing behind His flock, carrying a huge lamb. The good shepherd image paintings were found on the catacombs of Rome, on liturgical buildings, in the frescoes of baptismal chapels, adorned on chalices, on lamps, rings and gems, glasses, and medals in the early ages of the church.

The image of Jesus carrying the lamb on His shoulders, illustrates the Gospel parable of the lost sheep carried back to the fold (Luke 15:3-7; John 10:1-18). This imagery of Jesus reveals the Mercy of God toward the Sinner. He carries the sinner on his shoulders and re-integrates him/her into the fold by his divine mercy like the father did the prodigal son in Luke 15. By this image, Jesus Christ himself depicts His readiness and swiftness with which he receives the greatest sinners to repentance. In the Luke 15 the good shepherd rejoices because "He was dead, and is come to life again" [Luke 15:24] and the good Shepherd, when having found his sheep, returns triumphant and not being able to contain all his joy, he calls all his friends and all his neighbours and begs them to take part in it: "Rejoice with me," he tells them, "because I have found the sheep that was lost" [Luke 15:6].

The Old Testament's understanding of Jesus as the Good Shepherd theologically derives from reading of Psalm 23 - "The Lord is my Shepherd." The pasture that psalm 23 says we were led to is Paradise from which we were driven out by the sin of Adam and Eve, but to which Christ has led us back, and in which He placed us through the 'waters of refreshment,' (Baptism). The 'Thou hast anointed my head with oil' as indicative of the Sacrament of Confirmation (Chrism): and the 'prepared table' is the "Holy Eucharist."

Another understanding of the image of the Good Shepherd is the one basically tied to the vocation to the priesthood and soul care or pastoral care. On Fourth Sunday of Easter, we are invited to pray for vocations. Christ the good shepherd continues to lead and feed his people through bishops, priests and deacon. Jesus Christ is the "Shepherd and Overseer of all souls" (1 Pet. 2:25), the "Chief Shepherd" of his flock (1 Pet. 5:4). As the Good Shepherd he seeks us out (Luke 19:10), intercedes continually for us (Rom. 8:34), feeds us (Matt. 6:25), heals us (Acts 3:16), convicts and then forgives us (John 16:8; James 5:16), cleanses us (2 Pet. 1:9), comforts us (2 Cor. 1:3ff), and leads us beside still waters, giving us rest in green pastures in order to restore our souls in His presence (Ps. 23).

You may email/send your faith questions to Fr. James and he will answer them in our

Sunday Bulletins.