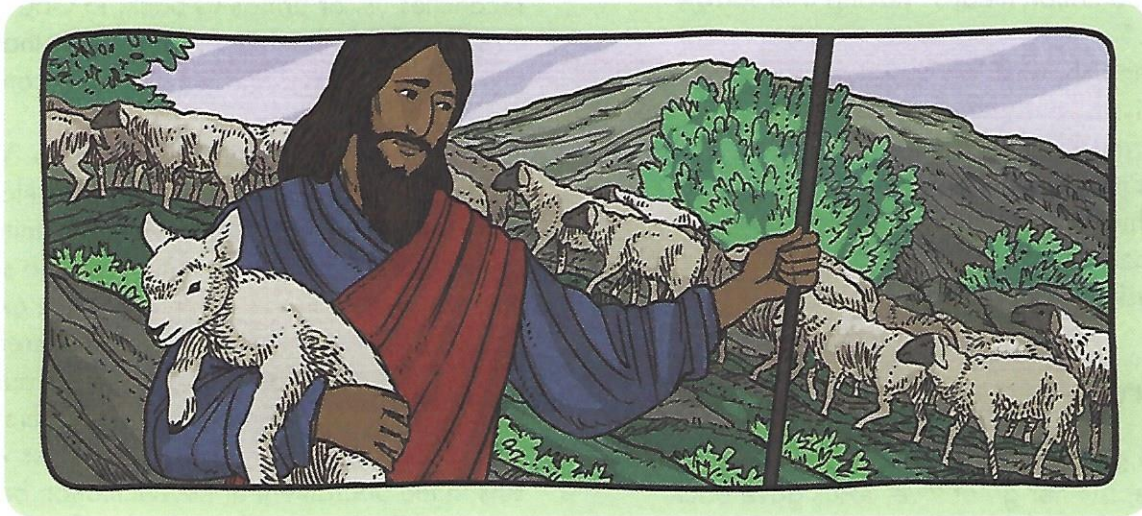


Chapter 6: Jesus Loves and Cares for Us



Introduction

Do you know what a shepherd is? A shepherd is someone who cares for sheep. A shepherd feeds the sheep and takes care of them. A shepherd makes sure the sheep are always safe. Who are the shepherds in your life? Who takes care of you and keeps you safe?

We call Jesus the Good Shepherd. If Jesus is the Shepherd, then who are the sheep? We are! The whole Church is the flock of Jesus. He takes care of each of us and all of us.

Scripture Story: Jesus Is the Good Shepherd

Let's listen to what Jesus says about being our Shepherd:

[Jesus said] "I am the good shepherd, who is willing to die for the sheep. When the hired man, who is not a shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees a wolf coming, he leaves the sheep and runs away; so the wolf snatches the sheep and scatters them. The hired man runs away because he is only a hired man and

does not care about the sheep. I am the good shepherd. As the Father knows me and I know the Father, in the same way I know my sheep and they know me. And I am willing to die for them." (John 10:11-15)

The Good Shepherd in this story is Jesus. Jesus takes good care of us.

Will Jesus run away when danger comes? No! He will stay with us and help us. And who is the wolf? The wolf is anyone who might harm us or lead us to do wrong. Jesus will chase the wolf away and stay with us. If we lose our way, the Good Shepherd will find us. The Good Shepherd gives his own life to save his sheep.

The Priest Is God's Shepherd

We have many shepherds in our lives. We have many people who take care of us. We have parents, teachers, maybe grandparents, and other caregivers.

The priest who hears our confession in the Sacrament of Reconciliation is also a shepherd. He welcomes us with love and care. When we confess our sins to the priest, we are confessing

them to God. The priest is God's representative, God's shepherd. The priest will listen carefully to our confession and guide us on the right path. He will help us to follow Jesus. He will forgive us in the name of Jesus.

God's Treasure of Forgiveness

Let's review the steps in the Sacrament of Reconciliation that we have learned so far:

- The priest greets us, and we make the Sign of the Cross with him.
- The priest may read a passage from Sacred Scripture.

The next thing we do is confess our sins. Then, after that, the priest may give us some words of advice or encouragement. He will then give us a **penance**. A penance is a prayer or good action that shows that we will do better. Doing a penance shows, in a small way, that we want to make up for what we have done.

Sometimes a penance is a prayer to pray. Sometimes it is an action to do. Sometimes it is a kind act to help someone we have hurt in some way. It is important to do our penance as soon as possible.

The priest will then invite us to pray an **Act of Contrition**. The Act of Contrition is a prayer that tells God we are sorry and will not sin again. Here is one Act of Contrition you can say:

My God,
I am sorry for my sins with all my heart.
In choosing to do wrong and failing to do
good,
I have sinned against you whom I should love
above all things.
I firmly intend, with your help,
to do penance, to sin no more,
and to avoid whatever leads me to sin.
Our Savior Jesus Christ suffered and died for us.
In his name, my God, have mercy. Amen.

The word *contrition* means "having true sorrow for sin and a desire to avoid sin in the future." This is how we return to God and mend our relationship with him. This is the process of conversion and repentance.

Our Act of Contrition in the Sacrament of Reconciliation tells God that we are sorry for our sins. In the Sacrament, we can say the Act of Contrition by heart or we can read it from a card. We should practice ahead of time so that we understand its words and can say it with our whole heart.

God wants us to be honest and sincere when we ask for forgiveness. That is why these four things are necessary for the Sacrament of Reconciliation to be complete:

1. We must have true sorrow for our sins (contrition).
2. We must be honest in confessing our sins to the priest.
3. We must do our assigned penance and do our best to make up for the sin.
4. We receive the priest's absolution.

Things to Remember

- Jesus loves and cares for us as a good shepherd cares for his sheep.
- Jesus seeks us out when we lose our way because of our sin. We can return to him through the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- The priest is God's representative and forgives us in the name of Jesus.
- We express our sorrow for having sinned by praying an Act of Contrition during the Sacrament of Reconciliation.