



Archdiocese of San Antonio
Most Rev. Gustavo García-Siller



**Mother's Day Weekend
The Good Shepherd
May 10 & 11, 2014**

Today is the World Day of Prayer for Vocations, Mother's Day, and Good Shepherd Sunday. Good Shepherd Sunday is a day in which we reflect on the common calling of love and service that we share as disciples of Jesus Christ. The Good Shepherd is one of the most loving images Jesus has given us of himself, carrying his lost sheep on his shoulders, saving us from danger, and restoring us to His flock.

We are all sheep, who in our own way, find ourselves wandering away from the safety of the Good Shepherd, lost in the wilderness of the world. Each of us, at some time, are confronted by the natural enemies of our faith, pulling us further and further away from the safety of the flock, and leaving our souls to starve even when we are surrounded by the Father's loving Grace.

In today's Gospel Jesus says "I am the gate for the sheep." Gates have many purposes. Some are built to exclude intruders while others are made to open wide to allow everyone in. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is the gate that invites all to enter, but is also a gate that protects His sheep. When a shepherd of Jesus' time would tend to the flock in the wilderness, he would herd his sheep into a space that was surrounded by rock walls or hills, leaving only one small opening. The shepherd would then lie down to block the opening. The only way the sheep could wander off, would be to literally walk on top of the shepherd.

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, laid down his whole life...body and soul...for his sheep. He was willing to feel the pain and be the living gate in order to protect his flock that he loved so much. When we speak of Jesus being the “Good Shepherd”, we are not just saying that he was morally good, but that his goodness is defined by God's love and patience. He wants to protect us from the harm that can mortally wound our souls.

The shepherd in Jesus' Palestine would watch over the flock, day and night. Most of the flock that he tended to was raised for wool, not for eating, so the shepherd could eventually watch the same heard for years. He would call out gentle, almost lyrical commands or harsh noises to direct his flock. He would even call them out by name to bring them closer to him for protection. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, calls each one of us by name, so that as we recognize his voice, protecting us from spiritual harm, bringing us closer to a personal and loving relationship with him, so that we need “Fear no evil.”

When I was ordained a bishop, I was given my crosier, a staff that is a sign of my being a shepherd to my flock. It is both the “Rod and staff” that give me courage to follow Christ and lead the faithful to, as the Psalmist proclaims, the “right paths for His name sake.” As my “rod” the crosier is a sign of my calling to protect the faith of the flock from intruders who would rob them of their faith and the peace of Christ. The hook at the top of the shepherd's staff was intended to help gently catch stray sheep and bring them back into the fold. As a priest, teacher, and shepherd, I am called to a vocation that is always guided by faith and love. Pope Emeritus Benedict once wrote, “One of the basic characteristics of a shepherd must be to love the people entrusted to him, even as he loves Christ whom he serves.”

Each of us are called to be signs of the Good Shepherd in the world. With loving, patient, and courageous hearts we follow Christ, and as his disciples, lead others to him. Celebrating World Day of Prayer for Vocations, we are reminded that the Latin word, “pastor” means shepherd. And on this Mother's Day, we lovingly celebrate those mothers who have been a gate of faith for their children, keeping them safe in the warmth of their loving arms.

Jesus tells us that the sheep follow the Good Shepherd, "...because they recognize his voice." In order to know his voice, we must know him. In order to know him we must encounter Jesus, the Gate that leads our souls to the eternally promised, "verdant pastures" and "restful waters." So that we "...shall dwell in the house of the Lord for years to come, for the Lord is my Shepherd.