

Are you finding it harder and harder to be like Jesus?...I hope so, because I am...For example, imagine this happening to you....You're taking a trip to your favorite vacation spot for some well-deserved R & R,...and as you enter the hotel to check in,...right there standing in the middle of the lobby is a crowd of people from back home: relatives, friends, people from your church. ...They followed you all that way because they need your help. It's nice to be needed,.. but 'come on', would we handle that situation the way Jesus did in today's Gospel? ...The disciples have just returned from the mission Jesus had sent them on two by two... They must've felt pretty good as they reported to Jesus all they had done... But, like Jesus., they were tired and worn out...So Jesus decides they all need to get away for a while,...away from the pressing crowds,...to rest and recharge their batteries before going back to minister to the people.But when their boat gets to where they thought was a quiet, secluded place,...it turned out to be not so quiet and secluded...A huge mob of needy people had followed them on foot and was there waiting for them...So, what did Jesus. do?

Did He get angry at the people for intruding on His plans?...Did He say to His disciples, "Ok, guys, let's get back in the boat and go find a place where they can't follow us?"...No !!!....That's what I would've done...Instead, Mark writes, "When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd ."...Sheep without a shepherd are pretty pitiful. ...Shepherd-less sheep are easy prey for wolves, coyotes and other predators...They can't outrun them,...they can't outfight them...and they certainly can't scare them off with their "baaa...baaa." ...And shepherd-less sheep are easily lured away from their flock by bad shepherds who want them for their own evil purposes...When Jesus. looked at that crowd, His heart went out to them...He saw people who were like helpless sheep with no shepherd to guide and protect them...He put their concerns before His own need for rest, and the Gospel says, "He began to teach them many things."

That was over 2000 years ago...Do you think it's any different today?...Don't you think Jesus looks at people today and sees many who are like shepherd-less sheep?...Confused, wandering through life unsure of what to believe,...unsure of who or what to follow?...A lot of our young people are in that group; I'll bet more than a few of us parents can attest to that...And I'll bet a good number of us here have been like sheep without a shepherd at different times in our life; maybe some of us are right now...And when we are,...Jesus. – our compassionate shepherd - is there ready to lead us down the path He knows is best for us...But that only works if we follow His lead...Sometimes, we don't like where He wants us to go..." Oh, come on, Jesus., that's too hard. Isn't there an easier way?"...Then there are times when we get a little too comfortable, life is good...we got it all figured out...we're doing ok...and so we kind of lose touch with the only one who can keep us from straying from the right path.

Those are the times we can get into trouble...because when we are not letting Jesus lead us,...we become easy prey for those false shepherds who are constantly trying to lure us down a path totally removed from the path Jesus wants us to take... In our 1st reading, we heard the prophet Jeremiah express God's anger at the false shepherds who were leading His people astray: "Woe to the shepherds who mislead and scatter the flock of my pasture, says the Lord ! I will take care to punish their evil deeds."...

My friends, false shepherds are everywhere...They are the tools of Satan...In 1Ptr 5:8 we are warned, "Be awake, be on the alert. Your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring **lion**, seeking someone to **devour**."...And Pope Francis, who very often refers to Satan in his homilies, reminds us, "Our Christian life is a continuous struggle...because Satan doesn't want our holiness,... he doesn't want us to follow Christ."...The Holy Father said, "Some think we are old-fashioned to speak of the devil in the 21st century...But look out! The devil is real...the devil is here ... and we must learn from the Gospel how to fight against Satan." That's our pope speaking...And Jesus., who spoke of the devil many places in the Gospels, called him "the Father of lies."...Satan sends his false shepherds to spread his lies,... to tempt us to follow the path he wants...the path of sin.

So, where are these false shepherds?...They're on magazine racks and on bookshelves, ...They're on primetime TV programs and in TV commercials...on movie screens,...in a lot of our so-called music...They're all over the Internet...All pounding away with messages that glorify behaviors that are contrary to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. ...And their messages are very tempting. ...They make them sound real good. ...And we can easily fall for their lies if we don't listen to the voice of our true shepherd, Jesus Christ...as He shouts down the false shepherds whenever they spew out one of their lies.

...When the false shepherds say, "If it feels good, go ahead and do it. Who can it hurt?", Jesus says, "I don't think so baby!"

...When the false shepherds say "Abortion isn't taking a human life. It's just a blob of tissue." Jesus says, "I don't think so baby!"

...When the false shepherds say, "So what if you're married?. You can't help it if you're attracted to someone else...You deserve some happiness. Enjoy it."...Jesus says, "I don't think so baby!"

.....When the false shepherds say, "Go ahead. It's ok to cheat on your taxes/exams...What difference is it going to make? Everybody does it."... What does Jesus say?... "I don't think so baby!"

...When the false shepherds say "Why should our tax dollars go to take care of another country's problems? ...Send those illegal aliens back where they came from."... What does Jesus say?... "I don't think so baby!"

.....When the false shepherds say "That person hurt you...It's no time to forgive. It's time to get even." What does Jesus say?... "I don't think so baby!"

These are the kind of lies – Pope Francis warns us – that the devil, the Spirit of evil, uses to keep us from following the path of Jesus...But, the Good News is we are not defenseless...The Good News is we are not like shepherd-less sheep, helpless against all those false shepherds. ...The Good News is we have a compassionate shepherd who will keep us on the right path...**IF we listen to Him**...In John 10:27, Jesus. says to us, "My sheep listen to my voice...and they follow me."... When we listen to His voice calling out to us from the Gospels, speaking His words of truth...when we meditate on His words,...take them into our heart...make them a part of us...His words will transform us,...to more and more seek the real & lasting happiness and peace only He can give...not the empty promises and fleeting pleasures that the Prince of Darkness offers us.

And this am/pm - at this Eucharistic Celebration – Jesus also speaks to us in the most intimate and tender way as the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for His sheep...His voice speaks to us through His Body and Blood at the Last Supper...In a few moments at the Consecration, listen for His gentle shepherd voice as He whispers into your ear, “You are my dear little lamb...Here is my body given up for you...Here is my blood, shed on the cross to free you from your sins...You are my little lamb and I am your shepherd.” ... May the voice of our true shepherd speaking to us through Word and Sacrament, guide us, protect us, and lead us to everlasting life. AMEN!

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