

Just as the sheep recognise the shepherd's voice, so we know the voice of Jesus when he calls us. This kind of love resembles the kind of love the Father has for Jesus. It is a love that binds us at once to the Father, to Jesus, and to each other.

Today's Gospel reading presents Jesus as the "good shepherd". The word "good" here means "good" in the sense of "noble" or "ideal", and not simply "good at" something. Unlike bad shepherds who let the sheep be eaten by wolves, Jesus is willing to lay down his life for the sheep. This relationship is the basis for the sacrifice that Jesus makes on behalf of the sheep. Note that it also extends to sheep "not of this fold" – this refers to future generations of believers and possibly the future entry of Gentiles into the fold of Christianity.

Application

The image of the good shepherd invites us today to reflect on those who have given dedicated service to the Church and its people – people like Sister Joan Sawyer and many others throughout our world, especially those who have worked for justice, peace and reconciliation. We are talking about laity, as well as clergy and religious, some well known and others less well known, who have followed the model of Jesus in being good shepherds. We may want to reflect on those places in our Church where we still need "good shepherding" or where the "shepherding" has left us in need. Some issues cry out for our Church's response, like the special needs of immigrants and refugees, the need to bring an end to violence and militarism, the trade policies that marginalise poorer nations.

Today's image of the good shepherd can also challenge us to apply the image to the wider world. Does not the good shepherd challenge our international institutions to show a special care for those in need – those who are poor and powerless, vulnerable children and minorities? Does it not challenge our nation and its institutions to a more sincere respect for human rights?

A world that makes real the loving care of the good shepherd must work to put an end to all kinds of abuse that God's people currently endure.