Christ Our Shepherd and King

Sunday Homily | Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe

In a few days, we'll be celebrating Thanksgiving. And there is one thing about Thanksgiving that we all know. And that one thing is that everybody, before they go to their Thanksgiving meal, they make a request. And the request is always for something to eat, because everybody wants to have their comfort food on Thanksgiving. Am I right or am I right? You're right on.

So here it is, we're celebrating this last Sunday of the year, and the Church recognizes that we need some comfort. And so we are given today, on this feast of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, the comfort psalm. Psalm 23 is the comfort psalm, because it's the one that I think everybody, everybody knows: "The Lord is my shepherd." If they know no other thing in any of the Psalms, they know that part: "The Lord is my shepherd." And it's very comforting, isn't it?

I'm only sorry that on this Sunday the Church did not use verse four in the responsorial psalm, unfortunately. Not St. Margaret Mary, you know; I mean the Church in general did not have all those verses of Psalm 23. Because I believe that verse four of that psalm, in a sense, speaks to what we are celebrating today.

Because what does verse four say? And I'm not going to be saying it exactly as it is, but sort of my own transliteration, which is: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me. Your rod and your staff, they bring me comfort." Your rod and your staff, they bring me comfort.

So it is a very comforting thing to know that our shepherd, our king, he takes care of us. And did you hear that line in our second reading from St. Paul? St. Paul says, "The last enemy to be destroyed is death." The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

And so here we are. We're actually traveling through the valley of the shadow of death, because one thing we know is that we're all going to die. And so many people are afraid of death. But Jesus is saying to us, "Have no fear, because I am walking with you. I am your shepherd so that I can take you to the place where I am, the place where I reign supreme as the King of the Universe, which is heaven."

And so as we think of it, we have received so many benefits from Jesus, our Good Shepherd. Because in our first reading we heard that he will take care of his sheep. He'll take care of the sick ones. He'll take care of the lame ones. Wherever they are, the stray ones, he will find them and he will bring them back to his fold.

So this feast is actually the fulfillment of that prophecy of Ezekiel. Yes, he has found his sheep. He has placed us all on his shoulders, and he's taking us home.

However, because we have received that from the Lord, it means that that is the message we have to take into the world, that we have to let the world know that they have a king who is a shepherd. The world needs to know this. And all the people in our world who are walking through this valley of the shadow of death, we want them not to fear any evil.

So those people who we heard about in the Gospel reading, the ones who are hungry and thirsty and naked and in prison and sick, these are persons walking through the valley of the shadow of death. And we, as we think about Jesus our Good Shepherd, it means that we who have received something from that shepherd, we have to shepherd the world. We have to shepherd our world.

So we know, yes, that every bishop is supposed to be a shepherd. Every priest is supposed to be a shepherd. Every deacon. But what it is is that the entire Church needs to shepherd the world.

So, my sisters and brothers, how are we going to assure those people, those people who are walking through the valley of the shadow of death, how are we going to assure them that they should not fear because God is with them? How will they know that? We have to be with them. We have to walk with them. We have to place them on our shoulders and, with Jesus, bring them home.

So we should be working to eliminate hunger and thirst, nakedness, homelessness, sickness even, and those in prison, because all of these people are Jesus himself waiting to be ministered to. So if this feast of Jesus Christ, the King of the Universe, is going to mean anything to us, we have to become shepherds like Jesus and shepherd those people.

Because as we heard in the Gospel, if we do not, then he will say, "Depart from me, because I was hungry and you did not give me anything to eat. I was thirsty and you did not give me anything to drink. I was naked, homeless, sick, in prison, and you did not minister to me." And when we ask the question, "Lord, when did we see this happen?" he's going to say, "Inasmuch as you did not do it to the least of these my brothers and sisters, you did not do it to me."

So let us make a resolution now to go out and to minister to our sisters and brothers in the name of Jesus Christ, our shepherd and king, the King of the Universe.