

# “Like sheep without a shepherd”

by Fr. Mark Pavlik  
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Throughout the Bible, a reoccurring image is seen of sheep and shepherd. In the Old Testament the people of God are often referred to as sheep of God's flock and in the Gospel of John, Jesus also uses the image of sheep in describing his followers. In this Sunday's Gospel, Jesus sees the vast crowd and is moved with pity for them, because they are like sheep without a shepherd. This image of sheep is a very endearing one and is often portrayed in Christian art, but I am not sure it is meant to be a compliment to us.

If you know anything about sheep, you will remember they are not known for their cleverness or strength. They have essentially no natural defense mechanism or ability to fend for themselves. They can't run very fast and do not have sharp teeth which makes them easy targets for predators looking for a quick and easy lunch. If a sheep tries to go through a hole in the fence and the hole is too small, it will just keep trying over and over to go forward instead of backing out. Sheep also have a tendency to stray from the fold, which makes them even more vulnerable to predators.

The job of the shepherd was to keep the sheep together and safe. He would lead them to food and water and act as their defender against trouble. When a sheep would wander off, it was the shepherd who would go after it and bring it back to the fold.

Whether we like it or not, I am afraid all of us sometimes have these sheepish qualities. We may think we are very clever and strong, but we do not always have a strong defense against sin. Too often, we can do the same dumb things over and over expecting different results, and left to ourselves, we are sometimes prone to wander off on our own, away from the Lord and can get lost in our own will.

Jesus offers us himself to be our shepherd and keep us on the right path. He strengthens us through the sacraments giving us the grace to be fervent in our faith. Through the Eucharist and Reconciliation, we gain the power to avoid sin and follow Christ more closely, and to grow in virtue. In the Church, we find commonality with other believers and safety within the flock. Our gathering in prayer with others offers us support in our journey and helps us to understand we are not alone.

In all aspects of faith, we are called to stay close to Christ, who is our Good Shepherd. In times of danger, He will protect us; in times of trial, he will support us and in times of need, He will provide for us. He understands our shortcomings and loves us in spite of them. In all things, He provides and cares for us.

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*Faithful Shepherd,  
You are not a hireling  
who runs away at the sight of danger,  
but Your fidelity was tested  
and proven on the wood of the Cross.  
Accept the gift of our gratitude  
for Your marvelous care.  
Help us to hear and follow Your voice.*

*Watchful Shepherd,  
who protects the flock  
and searches tirelessly  
for those who wander from the fold,  
retrieve the lost and bring them home.  
Tend and heal their wounds.*

*Good Shepherd,  
who lays down His Life for His sheep,  
nourish Your people with the Bread of Life,  
that we may reflect Your likeness  
and enjoy the spring of Living Water  
that never ends.*

*Amen.*