

I Am the Good Shepherd

(Joh 10:1-28).

* We are certain that many sisters in Christ dream to join the company of women who went to the tomb of Jesus at the memorial morning. There they were blessed with the renewing of their hope and faith caused by the manifestation of deity over the perishable world. We also are certain that some of us dream to be in the same room with the apostles at that moment when Jesus first time appeared to them after his glorious resurrection. With these dreams in mind, if you would ask me, *What is your the desirable thing among all pleasures of the world?* Well, I would say that it is to perceive the risen Lord by my physical eyes and to discover his goodness. In my turn, I ask you the rhetorical question, doesn't this accomplishment powerfully work the apostles' hope and faith? Yes, it does. For instance, upon seeing the risen Master, their hopeless and faithless turned to life; next to that of the internal knowledge of Jesus' divinity. The same knowledge of Jesus' divinity and faith in his everlasting goodness gradually take place in us because the risen Lord is here as he said, *And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age,"* (Mat 28:20). Today Jesus visits the inner room of the hearts by his Spirit and makes his divinity knowledgeable to those who believe. For it is what is written of us, *Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed,* (Joh 20:29). That is to say, even though we do not see him by our physical eyes, yet we believe in him and rejoice with all the church in Christ Jesus obtaining the outcome of our faith, the salvation of our souls, (Pet 1:9).

* When thinking in terms of real time applicable for a historical event, then we have the three full weeks after Jesus' resurrection. During the time until his ascension, Jesus began to show himself to many disciples, and he continued to do it until the knowledge of his divinity met each point in proper order. But now the Spirit of Jesus works the living hope and faith in us as it was in the beginning making us the partakers of his resurrection. At this moment, he continues to work faith in us on our hearing his words. On our part, we work one purpose with him by all possible means trying to understand and to believe the teaching of the Lord (Joh 6:29) as it was understood and believed on by the apostles and evangelists. Otherwise, it would be sinking sand for our hope and faith. If such hope and faith were tested by fire, they would perish, (1 Pet 1:7; Mat 13:21).

* Now, let us give ears to the testimony of the Lord Jesus about himself as it was narrated by the apostle John in chapter 10 of his Gospel. From the previous chapter we learned that Jesus' audience was composed of his followers, opponents and mediators, (vv. 20,21). To them Jesus colored his speech with nomadic imageries drawn from sheep and shepherding as far as his listeners were the descendants of the nomadic nation. Besides, all patriarchs were shepherds;

the king David was a shepherd and some prophets were as well. Jesus' listeners knew that in the prophetic language the God of Israel stood for a Shepherd and Israel for his flock, (Isa 40:11).

* On hearing Jesus' discourse the listeners figured out what he was talking about saying, "I am the good shepherd. ...," (v.11). In order to make his statement clear, Jesus contrasted the genuine shepherd with the false whom he called the thieves and robbers. Jesus said that those people violated the order prescribed for the genuine shepherd. Sheep may examine if their shepherd is a real one or if he is a robber by posing a question, *Did this shepherd enter into our sheepfold by climbing over the wall, or did he enter through the gate?* Beginning from (v.11) Jesus defined himself by saying, *I am the good shepherd*. The most significant characteristic of Jesus' shepherding is that he lays down his life for the sheep. In contrast to the good shepherd, there is a hired one. That one is not as Jesus because he flees before the wolf. Therefore, sheep can figure out who is who based on Jesus' witness about himself.

* According to what we read from the prophets and from the personal testimony of Jesus Christ, we know that he is the Shepherd of Israel and the sheep stand loosely for the Jewish people. However, in our text Jesus mentioned other sheep that they also belong to him, (v.16). and these stand for the Gentiles. They will come in and join the one flock. When Peter, the apostle, still was not certain about it, he had a vision on Cornelius' account, (Act 10:11-16), who was a Gentile. Paul also witnessed that the Lord had commanded him, saying, "'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'" (Act 13:47). Upon hearing this, the Gentiles *began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed*, (Act 13: 48). The same joy overwhelmed us when we received the Holy Spirit and believed that we have the Good Shepherd, who is the Lord, Jesus Christ.

* The very reason for joy of being the sheep of Jesus Christ was also embodied in works of art and poetry as for example in the painting of the German artist, Bernard Plockhorst, *The Good Shepherd* and in the Psalm composed by King David, *The Lord is My Shepherd*. Even though the considerable distance of time and genre separates these two compositions, they are still common in expression of a beauty caused by the work of the Good Shepherd in human life. Taken together, the painting and the Psalm, they supplement each other with the creation of the more lovely and colorful image of our Lord. We see next a verbal portrait drawing from both compositions. But first is the painting.

* In the foreground of the wild landscape the painter depicted the figure of a man drawn likely from a common image of a Palestinian pilgrim than a shepherd. The distinguished face of that man is perfected with a harmony of peace and love. His left hand rests upon a staff and on his right arm he is gently holding the little lamb from beneath. We note that the one leg of the lamb is injured. Behind the man we see sheep;

some follow near, some not. From this we conclude that the man is a shepherd. With the next detail, at the man's left side, there is the mother sheep of the little lamb; she follows close to the shepherd. She keeps her eyes on her baby, much the same as the shepherd. The general tone of the scene reflects the well-balanced relation between the shepherd and his sheep. They feel secure and they are provided for. In return, the sheep follow exclusively after their shepherd because they know his voice and they obey him.

* The image of this shepherd, if it is adjusted to the divine pastor, reminds us of the notion that he is the Good One. As acknowledged of this truth by the many evidences in our lives, we breathe with King David, *I shall not want*, (Ps 23:1). As a former shepherd, David was in touch with the needs of sheep. The abstract picture of a flock resting in a green pasture near fresh waters flashed back from his memory to the verbal composition, *He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters*, (v.2). The competence of the good shepherd who cares for the physical needs of his flock corresponds to our Savior who is experienced as a model of faithfulness and fidelity to his people. King David was a brave man for even in his youth he was able to defend the sheep of his father from lions and bears if not to mention jackals and wolves, (1Sa 17:34,35). With respect to the Lord Jesus, we have a much better defender than any man, or government. The good shepherd knows how to save his flock, (Luk 18:8). *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 comfort me*, (v.3). At this moment we need to stop drawing the image of the Good Shepherd and switch to a summary account because of the time limit.

* Today we matched the imagery of the Good Shepherd from the two works of arts and that one from John's gospel with the Lord Jesus whom we know by his deeds in our lives. Friends, isn't our Lord Jesus the Good Shepherd we learned from the Scripture and the arts? Certainly, he is the Good One! It is not a theoretical knowledge of him, but it is because the Holy Spirit opens our inner eyes and the invisible things become visible. It is Jesus who keeps us physically well; it is Jesus who feeds us with natural and supernatural food; it is Jesus who gives us work so that we can pay our bills and have a place to live; it is Jesus who protects us from thieves and robbers; and it is he who provides us the place where his people can gather and worship him, the Good Shepherd. Now figure out what we say and be sure in the promise of the Good Shepherd who says, *I give them (my people) eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand*, (Joh 10:28). Finally, with the apostles, evangelists and all saints on earth let us confess, - Jesus Christ is the Good Shepherd, he is the unshakable ground of living hope and faith for all who believe in Him. Amen.

Beloved of the Lord, may the God of our salvation save and protect his flock from theft and robbery.

Amen.