

Companions IN PRAYER



Sisters of St. Clare
Saginaw, MI

Jesus, the Good Shepherd

I have only once seen a real shepherd herding sheep, and that was when I was in Northern Africa with the Peace Corps in the 1970's it was not a heavenly Christmas card scene. The shepherd that I saw was as unkempt as his sheep. Long days wandering the hill sides while the sheep graze is a rough life.

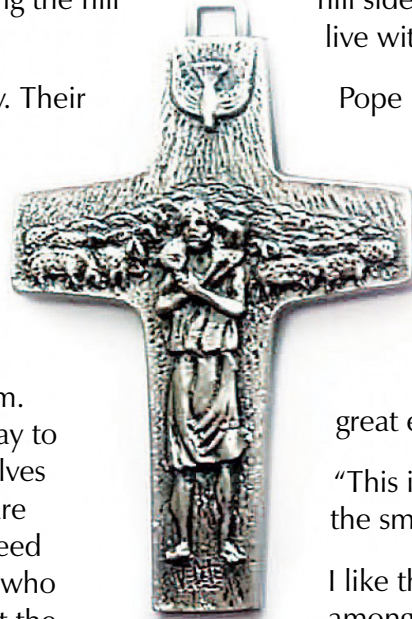
In the fields, sheep are not soft and cuddly. Their wool is clotted with mud, manure, burrs, and knots. Often the sheep seem confused and unaware of their surroundings. They frighten easily and wander off from the herd. They are not known to be particularly intelligent animals. In fact, they seem unaware of the danger that surrounds them. Without natural defenses, they have no way to protect themselves from predators like wolves and are vulnerable to attacks. Since they are unable to provide their own safety, they need a shepherd's help and protection. Friends who know sheep tell me that the sheep do trust the shepherd's voice and do respond to their leaders call.

The shepherd protects and manages the sheep with a special staff. It has a hook on the end to capture a wandering sheep and bring it back to the herd. The rod of the staff is used to encourage the sheep to stay together.

The shepherd needs these sheep for his livelihood. He sells the wool and provides food for his family.

With the shepherd to watch them, these sheep are protected.

This interdependency of shepherd and sheep is used in early Christian images of Jesus the Good Shepherd.



*Pope Francis
pectoral cross*

We are the sheep who need to be protected from dangerous attacks. Jesus cares enough about our safety to stay with us in the fields. I find this Christian image still very comforting in a world far removed from the hill sides of Biblical times. Fear and vulnerability live within us even today.

Pope Francis understands this interdependency between Jesus as Good Shepherd and our lives today.

The papal insignia on his pectoral cross shows Jesus portrayed as a shepherd. In the Pope's very memorable Holy Thursday chrim Mass homily, he said to his priests, with great emphasis,

"This is what I am asking you, be shepherds with the smell of sheep..." (March 28, 2013)

I like the Pope's image of being a shepherd among us so much, that I have a copy of his pectoral cross in my own collection of crosses. It reminds me of my own responsibility to reach out to others as a protector and care-giver whenever I am able...even, as the Pope warns, the sheep may smell.

I sometimes remember our own dog when I was growing up. She was a shepherd to us. She went with us everywhere. We had a paper route in the family. My two older brothers delivered morning and evening. I was initiated into the delivery operations by being given the Sunday morning paper route.

The papers were particularly heavy since there was only one delivery on Sunday. My Dad would pick up the bundled papers with the car and leave a pack of

newspapers on the street corners of my route. The dog and I walked the papers to the door steps. I found great comfort in having our dog as a companion in the early morning hours.

The feeling of companionship stays with me when I remember those early mornings delivering papers.

Since my dog was with me, I didn't feel frightened. I was reminded of that safe feeling when I visited my aunt in a nursing home. She had a stuffed cat on a chair. I picked it up and it made a cat sound and a stretching movement. I looked up at her and asked if she petted this animal. She said, "Yea especially at night when it reminds me of my cat." I knew what she meant. Holding an animal can be very comforting. Holding and petting even a stuffed animal can be very comforting. There is a warmth and peacefulness that lessens the feeling of loneliness.

Saint Clare Day

This year on August 11 we remember our founder, St. Clare of Assisi. I have been thinking about how sad she must have felt after St. Francis died. She lived and continued his work 12 years after his death.

St. Clare, more than anyone else, understood him. They were friends. They lived in the same town and were baptized in the same church. Their lives coincided in many ways. St. Clare heard St. Francis preaching in the streets of Assisi. She was inspired by his message and chose to join with him as he followed his vision. He led the men, and she would lead the women.

I think that the reason I have been thinking about St. Clare's sadness is that two close friends of mine have died very recently, and I'm also walking another friend home as she faces her imminent death from cancer.

I have felt great pain in losing these friends. The pain is especially sad for me because as I lose them, I am aware that in many ways, I am losing our shared history. Our love and respect for each other developed over many decades of our lives. Together we endured many challenging situations. We found comfort with each other as we shared our stories and memories.

As I grow older and attend more wakes and funerals, I'm aware of how often Psalm 23, "The Lord is my Shepherd", is chosen as a scripture for these services. As I hear the psalm read or sung, it does comfort me. Asking the God Shepherd to come to us, hold us, be with us, is, for me, one of the ways I know who God is. I can only long for the experience of a Good Shepherd to guide me through the dark night of death to the new dawn. It helps me to know that I will not be alone as I make this last journey.

(We are interested in your thoughts. Let us know at: <http://srsclare.com/about-us/companions-in-prayer-newsletter>)

Sr. Laura and Sisters

Of course, I still have the memories of my friends, but I so miss their presence and comfort that we gave each other when we were together. I'm sure that we have all experienced this kind of grief. As I remember St. Clare, I can feel her heart ache after the death of St. Francis. Remembering her pain draws me closer to her, and gives me a special peace as we celebrate her feast day.

New Bishop arrives July 26, 2019



Pope Francis names Bishop Gruss as the 7th Bishop of Saginaw. Sr. Dianne welcomes him at his installation Mass.