

Easter 2, 2019, Pusey House, The Good Shepherd

As Christ is both Shepherd and Sacrificial Lamb, so we are both the Sheep and Sacrifice in the embrace of the eternal love.

***I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. ... I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.***

The image of the Good Shepherd is one of the most beloved and favourite of God's people. For the prophet Ezekiel, God's care for his people is the care of the Good Shepherd: ***For thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out. .... I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down.*** In the Gospel of St John, we hear how the Lord Jesus reveals and teaches that all that the people hoped for in King David, the Shepherd King of Israel, more than they even imagined, is given and fulfilled in Him.



On the front of our bulletins you can see one of early representations of the Good Shepherd. This image comes from Ravenna, from the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, a Roman noblewoman and niece of the Emperor of Constantinople who died in the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. The mausoleum and the mosaics were completed between 425 and 430, the year that St Augustine of Hippo died. (He could have seen them had he chanced to be in Ravenna in the last years of his life.) The mosaic presents the Good Shepherd as a young man, beardless, dressed in gold and purple. He is youthful with the new life and youth of the eternal day and springtime of the Resurrection.

In the image, his golden staff is both the hard wood of the cross – he lays down life for his sheep – and it is the staff of victory, *now is the victor's triumph won*: he lays down his life to take it up again. This good shepherd feeds us in green pastures, beside the waters of comfort – his presence among us is the gift of a new and better Eden, a better paradise, cool waters in a desert. With this shepherd, we can face terrible trials and even the valley of the shadow of death – I will fear no evil. A note from the brother of one of the people we will remember among the faithful departed this morning included the beautiful comment that ‘even in death we may our song, Alleluia’.

Today, the Good Shepherd sets a table for us, where he gives himself to be our spiritual food and drink in the heavenly banquet of the Holy Communion, the marriage feast of the Lamb. He himself pours upon us the oil of super-abundant grace, the life of the Holy Spirit. In the sacrament of the altar, he touches us as surely as the Good Shepherd touches sheep in mosaic in Ravenna. Looking at it this morning, I realized that we could see this as an image of Christ putting the food of the sacrament in our mouths. Surely that's not

an accident, and **Surely thy loving-kindness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life : and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever. Alleluia.**

Part of what makes the image of the Good Shepherd so compelling is also a paradox – the Good shepherd is also the sacrificial lamb - *I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.*

The Good Shepherd is a symbol of the love which is stronger than death: the Shepherd becomes a sheep to trample down death by death. Our commemoration of the Good shepherd also has a two-fold character – we are we are both the Sheep and Lambs taken up and inserted into the Sacrifice which the Good Shepherd make for us. It is in this two-fold character that we come to share the Risen Life of the Good Shepherd, and to know and feel that love which is stronger than death. As Christ is both Shepherd and Sacrificial Lamb, so we are both the Sheep and Sacrifice, in union with Him, the Risen Lord. This is both a reality in which we live and the promise which we seek. Alleluia. Or, to put this in another way, I'd like to help us to enjoy the promise offered in what that most-Anglican of recent popes, Benedict XVI, says about the Good Shepherd: 'The liturgy is the means by which earthly time is inserted into the time of Jesus Christ and into its present. [The Eucharist, the Holy Communion] is the turning point of the process of redemption. The Shepherd takes the lost sheep on his shoulders and carries it home.'<sup>1</sup> 'Past, present, and future interpenetrate and touch upon eternity.' (SofL, 60).

In the Eucharistic prayer, we remember and represent the work of Good , who suffered death upon the cross for our redemption: *He made there by his one oblation of himself once offered, a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.*

This is an historical event. It happened just once, and it belongs to the past. In this sacrifice, the work begun in the creation of the world is brought to completion, the true temple is finally complete, it is finished.

But this is not simply a mechanical act, the slaughter of a body, it is a reasonable sacrifice – the Good Shepherd's life is not just taken by force, he lays it down in the freedom of a perfect and divine love. This interior act, the divine love and self-giving, does not belong simply to the past. In this way, the once-for-all and perfect sacrifice bears within itself the always.<sup>2</sup> The once-for-all sacrifice of the Good Shepherd reaches out toward the future.<sup>3</sup> In words of Benedict XVI, 'In the Eucharist, we are caught up and made contemporary with the Paschal mystery of Christ, in his passing from [his earthly tent, from the tent of his human body], from the tabernacle of the transitory into the presence and sight of God'. Christ's love for his sheep, his self-offering, is not over and gone. And this means that we don't just remember a past event, we are made contemporaries with the Good Shepherd's 'own act of worship' on the cross,<sup>4</sup> when he lays down his life of his own accord, he lays down his life to take it up again for us and in us.

This does not mean only that we are inserted into a past event, but rather than time itself and history, our history, our today, is broken up and made transparent to the eternal self-giving of the Son. This eternal self-giving of the Son to the Father in the bond of love, the Holy Spirit, is the life of heaven, this is the life which is the source and being of all that exists. In being inserted into the past, we are also taken out of 'worldly time' and led into the 'communion of eternal love'.<sup>5</sup> In our remembering, the once-for-all, reaches out

---

<sup>1</sup> Spirit of the Liturgy (SoL), p 61. See also, POST-SYNODAL APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION SACRAMENTUM CARITATIS OF THE HOLY FATHER BENEDICT XVI TO THE BISHOPS, CLERGY, CONSECRATED PERSONS AND THE LAY FAITHFUL ON THE EUCHARIST AS THE SOURCE AND SUMMIT OF THE CHURCH'S LIFE AND MISSION

<sup>2</sup> SoL, referring to Bernard of Clairvaux, Benedict XVI writes, 'the true *semel* ("once" [for all]) bears within itself the *semper* ("always")'.

<sup>3</sup> SoL, 58. The Today of the Resurrection, the Eternal day, when our Lord Rises from the day, these Todays 'embrace the whole time of the Church'. SoL 57

<sup>4</sup> SoL, 70

<sup>5</sup> SoL, 70

for the eternal, and the eternal enters into the present moment of our praying and receiving, angels ascending and descending on the ladder of the Son of Man.<sup>6</sup>

How does this happen, and why would we want it? In the liturgical action, in worship, we aren't just remembering or living what happened to Christ, that love which is as strong as death is also being shaped in us. We can see something of this, and reach for the promise, if we consider the phrase which we repeat at the offertory each week. The Priest asks, that we would all pray that 'this my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God, the eternal Father'. We respond asking that 'May the Lord accept the sacrifice at thy hands, for the praise and Glory of his Holy name, for our Good, and the Good of all his Holy Church'. This is a controversial phrase, because it raises reformation controversies about the meaning of the Eucharistic sacrifice. Without wanting to address these controversies, I will simply accept, with E B Pusey for example, that there were confusing and damaging ideas of the sacrifice of the Eucharist current in the late medieval Church. But because the existence of false notions of sacrifice does not mean that all notions of a sacrifice of the Eucharist are wrong. In Augustine's words, 'the true Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus', the Good Shepherd of the Sheep, 'designed that there should be a daily sign' of the sacrifice which he chose to be and to make. This daily sign, 'the sacrament of the altar'<sup>7</sup> 'is the sacrifice of the church, which, being His body, learns to offer herself through him.'<sup>8</sup>

What sacrifice do we offer? Most basically, we offer nothing of ourselves which is not first offered by Christ. By ourselves, we are sheep caught in the thicket, tangled up in a thorn bush, stuck, and more wounded the more we struggle. The Good Shepherd rescues us and takes us home.<sup>9</sup> But as members of His body, joined to our head, and sharing in his Risen Life, we are inserted into his sacrifice, into the gift of himself in love. It is this participation in his sacrifice which makes any sacrifice we offer 'acceptable to God, the Almighty Father'. And yet, what is His is in some way ours also, because our communion with him is not mechanical, it is not forced upon us, it is our freely given 'yes' to what he has done for us and in us. We also offer and give ourselves in love. He first give himself for us, but in Him and with Him, 'we offer and present [to the Good Shepherd] ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice'.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> SoL, 60

<sup>7</sup> Augustine, *City of God*, Book X, Chap 6, see the next quotation for the context: 'And this also is the sacrifice which the Church continually celebrates in the sacrament of the altar, known to the faithful, in which she teaches that she herself is offered in the offering she makes to God.'

<sup>8</sup> *City of God*, Book X, Chap 20. In Book X, Chapter 6, Augustine connects the 'sacrifice of the altar' with the sacrificial life of the Christian: a 'true sacrifice', he says in the first sentence of this chapter, is 'every work which is done that we may be united to God in holy fellowship'. He continues, referring to the sacrifice of the sacrament of the altar in the last sentence: 'If, then, the body, which, being inferior, the soul uses as a servant or instrument, is a sacrifice when it is used rightly, and with reference to God, how much more does the soul itself become a sacrifice when it offers itself to God, in order that, being inflamed by the fire of His love, it may receive of His beauty and become pleasing to Him, losing the shape of earthly desire, and being remoulded in the image of permanent loveliness? And this, indeed, the apostle subjoins, saying, "And be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed in the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God."<sup>295</sup> Since, therefore, true sacrifices are works of mercy to ourselves or others, done with a reference to God, and since works of mercy have no other object than the relief of distress or the conferring of happiness, and since there is no happiness apart from that good of which it is said, "It is good for me to be very near to God,"<sup>296</sup> it follows that the whole redeemed city, that is to say, the congregation or community of the saints, is offered to God as our sacrifice through the great High Priest, who offered Himself to God in His passion for us, that we might be members of this glorious head, according to the form of a servant. For it was this form He offered, in this He was offered, because it is according to it He is Mediator, in this He is our Priest, in this the Sacrifice. Accordingly, when the apostle had exhorted us to present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, our reasonable service, and not to be conformed to the world, but to be transformed in the renewing of our mind, that we might prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God, that is to say, the true sacrifice of ourselves, he says, "For I say, through the grace of God which is given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. For, as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another, having gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us."<sup>297</sup> This is the sacrifice of Christians: we, being many, are one body in Christ. And this also is the sacrifice which the Church continually celebrates in the sacrament of the altar, known to the faithful, in which she teaches that she herself is offered in the offering she makes to God.'

<sup>9</sup> P 32, SoL

<sup>10</sup> What do we offer? In a more challenging way, we offer Christ to be slain for us. He died that we might be freed from our sins, and so, in our sins, we offer him to be crucified. This is the meaning of the passion narrative where we Christian people take on the role of saying crucify him. With Peter and Judas who betrayed him, with people of Jerusalem who spoke more truth than they knew when they said 'His blood be upon us and upon our children' (Matthew 27.25), and with the Roman power, all the Gentiles, we offer up the Good Shepherd to lay down his life for us. You could say that we enact that part of the offering in the confession of our sins. (This is a paraphrase of Michael McGuckian *The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass*, 102).

This offering of ourselves is both pictured and acted out in one of the ceremonies of the mass that is obscured somewhat by the hymn which we sing together at the offertory. The bread and wine which we place on the altar and offer to God during the hymn are the sacrifice of the whole people of God. The collection of an offering in the form of gifts of money, of our substance, while the offertory hymn is sung, is one of the ways we make this connection. In the gift of our earthly treasure, and in the gift of bread and wine on the altar, we offer a sacrifice to God which is both a real sacrifice, and a sacrifice that is a token of the greater sacrifice of ourselves, our souls, and bodies. We cannot make this sacrifice ourselves, we must first re-present the perfect sacrifice of the Good Shepherd. In the celebration of the Holy Communion, we are inserted into the once-always which contains within itself the always, the eternal self-giving of the Son. By feeding on this sacrifice given to us in the sacrament of the altar, the wedding banquet of the lamb, it is possible to offer ourselves to God with him and in him, our Good Shepherd. As he is Shepherd and Sacrificial Lamb, so too are we Sheep and Sacrifice.<sup>11</sup>

Before we enact and enter into this reality in the re-presentation of the once sacrifice once offered, I'd like to take us back briefly to Ravenna. If you find yourself in Ravenna looking at the Good Shepherd in the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, then you are looking back toward the door by which one enters the chapel. The Good Shepherd is the door, and whatever we have or offer in the economy of the divine love, we do by entering in through him. But if you are looking at the Good Shepherd, you are looking at a barrel vault covered with golden stars against the wonderful blue background. This is not just a decoration.

In the words of a modern divine, Robert Crouse: 'He is the cosmic shepherd, the universal shepherd, whose watchful care infuses and governs the whole order of creation, and brings it to its final redemption in himself: "there shall be one flock and one shepherd"'. When we celebrate Jesus as the Good Shepherd, as we do today, what we celebrate is the universal providence of God... that watchful care, that unwearied love which governs all creation, from the highest angel to the least atom.'<sup>12</sup>

It is this all-embracing providence, the love that moves the sun and stars, that make it possible for us to face the most difficult and painful trials and in hope and trust. In the words of our epistle for today: 'if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently; this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps'. This is not a throwaway line, easy piety. Rather, we are invited to find even in the crosses which we do not choose and would not choose for ourselves an opportunity to lay down our lives with Christ, in him and with him, we lay down our lives that we may take them up again. In this consecration of our wills, in saying, in the face of the very things which seem to deny God's love or care us, precisely there, 'thy will be done', we are not abandoning ourselves to a cold fate but placing ourselves in the embrace of eternal love, anchored within the self-giving and 'watchful care' of the Good Shepherd whose love and wisdom 'infuses and governs the whole order of creation'. This sacrifice of Christ and of ourselves in Him 'has nothing to do with destruction. It is an act of new creation'. In choosing and consenting to be carried home on the divine-human shoulders of the Good Shepherd, we discover ourselves to be held in the eternal embrace of divine love, the

---

<sup>11</sup> This is filled out and expounded in Michael McGuckian *The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass*, Gracewing, 2004, esp pp 99-105, and 112-114. Interestingly, he draws on key Anglican sources to make his argument.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Crouse, 'The Good Shepherd', A Sermon for the Second Sunday in Easter, St. James Church, Halifax, AD 1987. See Lectionary Central, Easter 2, Recent, Crouse, Sermon 2, <http://www.lectionarycentral.com/easter2/Crouse2.html>. See also, Benedict XVI, *Spirit of the Liturgy*, who says very much the same thing in relation to the Good Shepherd, pp 33-34. Sacrifice in Christ assumes 'the aspect of healing, loving transformation of broken freedom, of painful expiation' 'who along can extricate me from the knot that I myself cannot untie', the 'shepherd who rescues him and takes him home is the Logos himself the eternal world'.

Good Shepherd, the Logos Himself, the meaning and the coming-home of the whole creation, and we will, all-together, dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Quoting Benedict XVI, SoL, 34.