

## “Shepherd Me, O God”

Charles Roggeman was a Marianist Brother who spent over thirty years at Chaminade-Madonna College Preparatory in Hollywood, FL. Brother “Chuck” as he was fondly known to the students, or “Charlie” to the Brothers, was a creative teacher with a few interesting methods. Whenever there was a quiz, he would have a student pull a number out of a bag and that would be the number of bonus points they could get for an extra credit question on the assessment. Every Monday, he would announce, “Hike four!” The students would stand and move their seats back four or up four “to get a different view of the room.”

When he retired from full-time teaching at 72, he often served as a substitute or could be found in the library to assist a needy student. Most mornings, the students could find “Brother Chuck” on the front stoop of the library and they would ask, “Brother Chuck, what is the word of the day.” Invariably, some new “vocabulary” word would be assigned for the day. The students would look up the definition and then come back to him to use it in a sentence.

I somehow think that Charlie would assign the word, “shepherd” as the word of the day today. So, let’s take a look at “shepherd.” You have heard about shepherds before so we know that they would tend the flock, try to stay awake all night to protect the flock from wolves, etc., and even lay in their dung to get the scent of the sheep to make for easier following. While the sheep tended to follow them blindly and because the ones closest to the shepherd did, they learned to trust the shepherd to keep them safe.

Shepherds didn’t care about the color of the wool or who the sheep liked. They simply tended all the sheep. The sheep didn’t necessarily belong to the shepherd; often times the shepherd was a hired hand or even a relative of the owner. Perhaps the shepherd dreamed of being the owner and not having to tend the flocks. But, Jesus tells us that HE is the good shepherd. The original hearers must have been a little bit confused. You see, shepherds are busy! Shepherds work hard and are on duty for extremely long shifts. They don’t get much rest and they have to be ever-vigilant.

This image of the shepherd, though, could also be familiar to the original hearers. Perhaps their thoughts went directly to Psalm 23 where they prayed as we did, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.” The rod and staff, often used to push or firmly guide the sheep bring comfort as they know they are well cared.

Some people use the example of sheep as someone who simply follows blindly and doesn't care who is. They talk about those who follow political leaders or even, in some cases, religious leaders who bring them way over to the right or way over to the left. As we are NOT sheep in the animal sense, we have to be careful who to choose as a shepherd. Yes, we have control over this.

Do we still need a shepherd? I think that maybe we do. We need to know that Jesus is STILL our Good Shepherd who loves us, cares for us, leads us, guides us, and wants us to follow him. He also talks about other sheep who are not of this flock. Every Sunday we say “No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here.” You have told me loudly, clearly, and plainly that you believe this. We have to be ready to accept all the sheep, regardless of color, what other

flocks they hung out with, who they love, and how they adorn their wool.

We want everyone who seeks a place to worship to know that they are welcome into this flock. The Good Shepherd is ready to receive all. How blessed are we? We still need a Good Shepherd. We still need some we can follow. We still need to be with other sheep. We still need to be exposed to other sheep from other flocks because our Good Shepherd loves them, too.

Shepherd us, O God, beyond our wants, beyond our needs from death into new life. Bring us into the new life given to us in the Resurrection. It is ours for the taking. The image of God you use is not important—It can be God as Shepherd, Jesus as Shepherd, Holy Spirit as Shepherd. The important part is that we choose to follow the Good Shepherd to the banquet of love, for surely goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our lives.