

December 9, 2025



LIKE A SHEPHERD, HE FEEDS HIS FLOCK

By David C. Robinson, SJ

Excerpts from Today's Readings

Zion, herald of glad tidings; Cry out at the top of your voice, Jerusalem, herald of good news! Fear not to cry out and say to the cities of Judah: Here is your God! Here comes with power the Lord GOD, who rules by his strong arm; Here is his reward with him, his recompense before him. Like a shepherd he feeds his flock; in his arms he gathers the lambs, Carrying them in his bosom, and leading the ewes with care.

ISAIAH 40:9-11

If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them goes astray, will he not leave the ninety-nine in the hills and go in search of the stray? And if he finds it, amen, I say to you, he rejoices more over it than over the ninety-nine that did not stray. In just the same way, it is not the will of your heavenly Father that one of these little ones be lost.

MATTHEW 18:12-14

Reflection

Advent is the season of the year when we are invited to relish the tender presence and promise of God. This is not a season of divine conquest or the cosmic mystery of the One who abides beyond our desires or our imaginings. God's reach and touch are infinitely personal, infinitely consoling. Throughout the centuries of scriptural witness, the peoples of God have sought a refuge for the uncertainties, conquests, and displacements of their many generations. In a world of imperial wars and domination, they yearn for a savior who might come with power and vindication, avenging all their grievances. While the desire for divine victory remains into the time of Jesus, the previous millennium also sees the birth of spiritual insights which recognize the gracious intentions of God for his people—the Psalmists who long to know God as God knows them (Psalm 139); the Wisdom literature which recognizes that divine Spirit shaping the inner vision of God's faithful (Proverbs); and the great Prophets who celebrate the endlessly loving care of God for his flock “carrying them in his bosom.” (Isaiah). In Advent, we join that great choir of the grateful devoted, who cherish and embrace a God who cherishes and embraces them. In the midst of circumstances that urge us toward anger, resentment, and condemnation, we sense that inner voice of gentleness and openness of heart that encourages freedom to seek a loving presence within. St. Ignatius, recognizing our inescapable temptation to judge rather than forgive, teaches a simple lesson. If we cannot find the desire to embrace the other with compassion, we should pray for the “desire for the desire.” If we seek to nurture love within, and fail to ignite the emotional spark, seeking to desire that gift at least gives our souls a place within to plant the first seeds that can yield a harvest of graciousness which can change our spiritual aridity into the promise of future hope and reconciliation.

Isaiah trusts in the ultimate power of God to foster new life and to renew the people's hope. He acknowledges the One who 'rules by his strong arm' in bringing goodness to all. Yet his is not a vision of the vengeful deity as a wrecking ball coming to shatter the palaces of conquerors. Rather, he presents the image of a gentle pastor—“like a shepherd he feeds his flock.” Transformation is a fruit of grace first and foremost. Held to the bosom of God, the faithful will ultimately triumph, not as a consuming fire, but as the harbinger of the kingdom of God's graciousness. This is not a sweet fairy tale, but rather a new history forged in the crucible of faith.

Matthew's gospel recalls this same vision in the parable of the hundred sheep. The human shepherd incarnates the tender care for the flock that mirrors God's

care for each and all—the saints and the sinners. In the ministry of Jesus, we witness the ever-expanding nature of the chosen, especially in the moving narratives about the Samaritans. These are the religious outcasts dwelling within the boundaries of the Jewish communities. Although they share common roots in the Mosaic traditions and the Torah, a rift over religious practice drives them into a place of enmity rather than fraternity. Jesus' compassion for the afflicted Samaritans heralds a new measure of God's embrace for all the poor and suffering,

In our own day, we all too easily fall prey to facile judgments and unreflective condemnations. In Advent we are not being invited to an unthinking optimism that 'God will take care of everything,' shuffling to the side our own vocation to strive without ceasing to establish the compassionate justice which is our birthright and our legacy. But our mission is one of gentle intention, not simply rigid vindication. The kingdom of love can only be established in love, not in an attitude of moral superiority or political validation. Jesus manifests to us our own anointing to discover our kinship among all who search for a foundation in truth -- to seek a wider circle of faith and respect beyond the harsh confines of our self-righteousness. Then we mirror the God who 'carries us in his bosom,' cherishing us as one family, not a cluster of ideological clans, hidden behind our walls of self-justification. When we pray 'Our father,' we pray not only for our self-selected companions, but for all the flock embraced by our God. We can no longer claim to know infallibly who the 'ninety-nine' justified people are, but rather can assume that in some way we too all go 'astray' on our own paths, needing the care of each and all to rediscover our true direction and destination in faith. These Advent days invite us to embrace a new freshness of soul, a rebirth of our commitment that all should finally return home, hand in hand, to the sheltering promise of God.



Jesus the Hope of the Poor
Image by David C Robinson, S.J.

For Pondering

- In these difficult times, have you found yourself quick to judge others' intentions or motives, without seeking the freedom of heart to search for a spirit of hope that aspires to justice with compassion?
- What are the most difficult issues or difficulties in our present situation that you might help to heal through a willingness to offer a gentle hand of help or support?
- How would you envision Jesus' walk along the paths of 21st century America? How might you emulate his willingness to welcome the 'lost sheep' you encounter with invitation before condemnation?

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