

071909 **WHERE IS THE GOOD SHEPHERD TODAY?**

(It is only when we choose to see what is happening around us through the eyes of faith that the Good Shepherd becomes visible.)

Last weekend I was down the seashore concluding my vacation. On Saturday I received a phone call from my sister who told me that my nephew had been admitted into the hospital with an infection. I had received that phone call many times before from her about him but the next day on the way back home I decided to stop in to visit him at the University of Pennsylvania Hospital. I brought him communion but he was having some difficulty swallowing and –I prayed the anointing of the sick over him. He thanked me and I was on my way. Two days later I was back in his room and they were preparing to take him off the ventilator. In the interim he had had two strokes, the second one doing major damage and he was no longer able to breathe on his own.

With his mom and dad around the bed, his sisters and their spouses I prayed this prayer:

*I commend you my dear brother Christopher, to almighty God, and entrust you to your Creator. May you return to the One who formed you from the dust of the earth. May holy Mary, the angels and all the saints come to meet you as you go forth from this life. May Christ who was crucified for you bring you freedom and peace. May Christ who died for you admit you into his garden of paradise. May Christ, the true Shepherd, acknowledge you as one of his flock. May he forgive all your sins, and set you among those he has chosen. May you see your Redeemer face to face, and enjoy the vision of God forever. Amen.*

Most Catholics never hear that prayer but it is very beautiful. It is prayed as a loved one prepares to leave this earth. It is full of consolation for those who hear it. I then prayed the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm which is our responsorial psalm for Mass today. “Even though I walk in the dark valley, I will fear no evil for you are at my side.” Later on other family members gathered to be there, to pray, to speak words of comfort, hope and support. To offer consolation. There was a lot of embracing and tears in the Intensive care Unit room, a lot of hugging and of course, some laughter too.

My nephew was 41 years old and leaves behind a fourteen year old daughter. Where was God during that travail? Doesn't the Lord know the impact on this young girl? Where is God at moments like these? God is right there. Jesus Christ was present in that room. You could feel it. You could feel the Lord's presence. There was sadness but no fear. None. There was pain and loss but faith and hope too. The Lord, the Good Shepherd, it is said, has no arms but yours, no words but yours, no way of being present but through you. In us and through us.

We prayed the Hail Mary. “Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen. “At the hour of our death.” Yes. That simple prayer was a most consoling prayer at that moment. It brought our faith home to us. There was actually a peacefulness in that room. There was love. “Jesus saw all those people and looked at them with compassion, like sheep without a shepherd.” That is what the Good Shepherd does. Except now he uses your eyes and mine.

Words. Presence. Touch. Hugs. Prayer. And then, refreshment, consolation, peace. Even at the loss of one so young. And in the process the Lord was Shepherd of us all if only we knew how to look with the eyes of faith, how to interpret what is really going on. On Friday Ellen the parish secretary asked me if I was going to take a day off and I told her that I was pretty well scheduled through the whole week. She did not press but I could tell she thought I needed to do that. Then Father Lyons said the same thing and I told him the same thing and he looked at me with the eyes of a brother priest and his eyes said, “Don't be stupid. Take a day and get away.” So I am. I made some phone calls and changed some appointments. And in the process your shepherd is shepherded in turn by you.

“Near restful waters he leads me.” The lord did that for my nephew this past week as he slipped from this life in a hospital room down in Philly. He is shepherding our family right now in and through you and others. The Lord does tend to our needs—always. If only we know how to recognize. And so it goes.