

GREAT MOTHERS AND REALLY GOOD SHEPHERDS

If you think real hard when I say The Sandy Hook Elementary school in Newtown, Connecticut in 2012, something inside your memory will stir and then something in your heart will remember. A gunman went into a grade school where there was a classroom of first graders. When he was finished twenty little ones and six teachers were gone. Before he started he began with his own mother. Most were six or seven years old. One was named Catherine Violet Hubbard. She was the younger of two children. Her mother's name is Jennifer. Jennifer writes a blog and a column from time to time as she continues to grapple with all that unfolded that day.

She was reading the Twenty-third Psalm, the responsorial psalm for today. Here is some of what she said:

The Good Shepherd...knows my earthly journey and that it must advance.

The Good Shepherd has carried me to still waters

The Good Shepherd brings me to higher places through the darkest of valleys.

His eyes remain keen for what lurks ahead.

His rod is at the ready for that which comes to destroy.

I am not shaken, for the Lord IS my shepherd there is nothing I lack.

It is this promise, six years later that I continue to draw on, trust and follow

Even when paths are frightening and dark

Even when I do not understand.

In these moments I embrace his closeness and know it is in his protection that I am able to walk

In this promise I am shown again and again that when the storm has passed, when the danger is averted, I will emerge onto green pastures, still waters, and find rest in the loving tenderness of the Good Shepherd.

And all this, after the loss of her six year old Catherine.

Jesus said: My sheep hear my voice. I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. (But she did perish! She did!) No one can take them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one can take them out of the Father's hand. The Father and I are one!"

What is going on here? Jesus is using terms of expression that are completely familiar with those who hear him. A shepherd and his sheep. We need to be schooled a little bit. There is a kind of knowledge that exists in the shepherd about his sheep that is very personal almost intimate. Not just understanding their quirks. Much more. A real grasp of what moves the sheep and frightens them to the point of panic. Us too. The Lord Jesus knows us like that. Not just our idiosyncrasies and quirks; not just our sins and faults and rash emotional responses but deeper.

Here is the point. Because of the intimate connection the sheep trust the shepherd and follow him. They listen for his voice. They listen to his voice. This opens them up not just to the shepherd but to the One who sent the Shepherd, to God himself. What Jesus is revealing is this: What God can do, Jesus can do. To hear Jesus is to hear God. The works of God are also the works of Jesus. The Father and Jesus are one. Not the same. Not identical. But one.

BUT. We want to believe this and yet we often find ourselves not experiencing what has been promised. Jennifer Hubbard must wince when she hears that her daughter is in the Father's hands. It didn't seem so that cold December day. Where was the Father then? Where was Jesus then? What did those words mean then?

But Jennifer Hubbard has come a long way since then. Her faith is so much deeper. She knows her little one is with the Father in perfect happiness—and forever. And she also knows that there will come a day when she will see her again. And hear her cry out with such joy, at the top of her lungs: “Mommy!” and then the embrace comes which is the Father's love and is revealed by the Good Shepherd whom we call by his given name—Jesus. That is what he came to reveal and to accomplish. But so often it only becomes crystal clear afterward. Up until then we must still live by faith blessed even when we do not see.