

The Manual for a Good Shepherd

Deacon George Collins

The “Good Shepherd” is another title by which we come to know God the Father. To be a shepherd is to be a guardian and leader. From the earliest times of man, the shepherd is simultaneously a leader and a companion; the strong defender of the weak. He is gentle with his flock, adapting himself to the needs of all and yet cherishing each as his own.

Shepherds did not always enjoy this kindly reputation. By the time of Jesus, shepherds were judged differently and more harshly. They were likened to thieves, beggars and people of poor reputations. But the prophecy of the good shepherd, who was yet to come, was always kept in the minds of God’s chosen people. Jesus fulfilled that prophecy. Jesus even seemed to have wanted to change the shepherds’ image, and placed shepherds among the people who received the Savior, and received the Good News at His birth. They were among the ones who were the first converts.

From the time of Moses, who was called the “Prince of Shepherds”, to the time of Jesus, who was called the Good Shepherd, there were all sorts of shepherds. Some were caring, others were indifferent. There were the cowards and the brave. Some were men and some were women. Yet Jesus brought these lowly people to great dignity by choosing to love them. God builds up what man tears down.

Recently I had the occasion to read some ancient prayer books and was struck by two prayers in them. The first, recited by men stated, “Blessed you be, oh God for not having made me a gentile, nor a woman, nor an ignoramus.” The second prayer recited by ancient Jewish women stated, “Praise be you Lord, who created me according to your will.” The prayer of the men seems to be filled with arrogance, while the prayer of the women is filled with

humility. In these prayers and in the writings of the wise men of old are the roots of the maximums attributed to women and about women. The biblical portrait of women bears man's signature and the portrait has not always been flattering.

Man describes his dream of finding a good shepherdess who is to be wife and the mother of his family flock. Thus he finds happiness and finds a nest against his wanderings; to find a helper like himself, a solid support system. To find a good wife is to find beauty personified. The new dimension of woman is brought to dignity and equality in the shepherding of motherhood. St. Paul also clarified the issue: "There is neither male nor female, we are all one in Christ." Mothers are first of all Church; the new Eve who gives birth to the body of Christ. It is in the motherhood of woman that God gave the special gift of life-giving, co-creator and the ability to give birth to the Prince of life. Thus God designed a means to salvation in motherhood; a fruit, born through the virginity of faith. Mothers thus become the spirit and symbol of the believing soul and God's relationship with His flock, the Church.

As modern day women emerge into equality and dignity, how does man respond? Many men respond as the good shepherd, but some react with indifference and others put worldly possessions above mothers, wives and families. A few, a very few, take better care of their cars than they do their wives and mothers. They expect their cars to last only five or six years, but they expect their wives and mothers to last for a lifetime. Maybe we need a maintenance manual for mothers and wives so we know how to take care of them. In the manual under the heading Engine: a mother's engine is one of the most dependable kinds you can find. She can reach top speed from a prone position at a single cry from a sleeping child. However, breaks are needed to keep up that top performance. Mothers and wives need a hot bath and a nap every 100 miles, a night out every 1000 miles and a live in baby sitter with a one week vacation every 10,000 miles. Under the heading Battery:

a mother's battery should be recharged regularly. Hand-made items, notes, unexpected hugs and kisses and a frequent, "I love you" will do very well for a recharge. Under the heading Carburetor: when a mother's carburetor floods it should be treated immediately with Kleenex and a soft shoulder. Under the heading Breaks: see that she uses her breaks to slow down and come to a full stop occasionally. A squeaking sound indicates a need for a rest. Under the heading Fuel: most mothers can run indefinitely on coffee, leftovers and salads. But an occasional dinner for two at a nice restaurant will really add to her efficiency. Under the heading Chassis: to maintain the body properly, regular exercise should be encouraged and provided for, as a necessity. A change in hairdo or make-up in spring and fall are also helpful. If you notice the chassis begin to sag, immediately start a program of walking, jogging, swimming or bike riding. These are most effective when done with fathers. Under the heading Tune-ups: mothers need regular tune ups. Compliments are both the cheapest and most efficient way to keep them purring contentedly. If these instructions are followed consistently, this fantastic creation and gift from God should last a lifetime and give good service and constant love to those who need her the most. So, all you who aspire to be Good Shepherds to your families get out the manuals and follow the instructions to the letter.