

Good Shepherds Smell Bad?

Intro. Anyone raise sheep? My knowledge of sheep is limited to what I research in preparation for this annual Good Shepherd Sunday. I have seen sheep and shepherds from a safe distance. The only contact with sheep many of us have is either seeing them at the county fair or in pictures. The usual image is of a clean, cute, cuddly lamb, held by a cute child. Sometimes the picture is of the lamb on the Lord's shoulders. Lambs quickly grow up into sheep that live outside and in all kinds of weather. The first thing to go is the clean, followed by the cute and cuddly. People who raise sheep often live with them in the fields for weeks or months at a time, moving them from one pasture to another in search of good food; keeping them safe from wandering away and untangling them from fences or, worse.

I. The Lord used this image often because it was one people knew well. Sheep herding didn't make them rich but it gave them milk, cheese and meat. Good shepherds took care of their valuable sheep. From what the Lord said, shepherds knew each animal by size, shape, color and sound. They knew which lamb belonged to which mother. Some even gave them names. This was in contrast to other shepherds for whom it was just a job, a paycheck or a meal. The Lord made this distinction to say he is a Shepherd who cares for his people like a good shepherd cares for the sheep.

In his annual Holy Thursday address to priests and bishops in 2013, Pope Francis said, "This is what I am asking you – be shepherds with the smell of sheep" on you. He meant if we don't have the smell of sheep on us, get out of the office and into the

field. It was a job at priest-bureaucrats. Good shepherds spend time with the sheep and can't help but smell like the sheep. Thanks to good hygiene habits, that's literally true anymore, but a good image.

Concl. We are not sheep, but we do have a tendency to wander away from the Lord and get lost. We get entangled in bad situations. People *needing* shepherding are not all found in homeless shelters and soup kitchens. Sometimes it's the person looking back at us in the mirror. *Shepherds* are not found exclusively in churches. They can be found families, workplaces and neighborhoods. Sometimes they are moms or dads; children; or co-workers. At one time or another, we all need shepherding. There is much pain and hurt in our families and our country. Instead of being passive or violent, we

might become shepherds of one another; heal the pain and hurt many of us feel; and lead each other to that green pasture of peace and safety the writer of the Psalm twenty-three described. **What we could take from this image of the Good Shepherd is to remember no matter how lost or far away from the Lord we get, the Lord can find us. If we want to be found. And we can be shepherds who find the lost and bind up the wounded and by doing that, we might find healing ourselves.**

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