

## *The Good Shepherd, Part 1*

April 15, 2018

“I am the Good Shepherd.”

We have this beautiful image presented to us of the Good Shepherd taking care of His sheep. We need images. We are not angels, but humans, seeing, touching, hearing — these are the beginnings of knowledge for us. Abstract concepts are usually linked to some image, giving it something that is seen, felt or heard. In the Sacred Scripture, we often have these images to teach us about God and His works since God is a pure spirit and we need pictures: God walking in the Garden, Our Lord sitting or standing at the Right Hand of the Father, etc. Images are deficient in describing God and it is evident that Israel thoroughly understood this truth from its horror of the graven image. Yet God’s appointed spokesmen never hesitated to describe the Lord in human and vivid terms. There is a risk in this, as there is with any analogy, but it is a risk the Sacred Author chose and so also does Christ use images. The image in today’s Gospel is that of the Good Shepherd.

The Israelites raising of sheep goes all the way back to their Father Abraham. The image of the Shepherd and his flock would have been natural to them, and so when Our Lord describes the relationship between God and His people in terms of a shepherd and his flock, they can picture it. Likewise the beautiful Psalm 22, “The Lord ruleth me: I shall want nothing,” or the newer translations, “The Lord is my Shepherd” presents us with a wonderful image. The image of leading us to waters and setting us in a place of pasture appealed to Our Lord as just and apt. But He made a startling change in the use of the image. Instead of saying, “God is your Shepherd,” He says “I am the Good Shepherd.” He and the Father are one, and so He can make the change.

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