

The Lamb is the Shepherd, the Shepherd is the Lamb. We are his people, the flock shepherded by the Lamb of God who carried our weight because of our sins as he suffered his passion and death on the cross. He did it so we could join with him in joyful celebration in heaven for all eternity.

Our Good Shepherd is the Lamb of God. Lamb of God, a term used 28 times in the Book of Revelations. The lamb, inextricably tied to the Passover sacrifice, mentioned as sacrifice many other times in the Old Testament, most notably in the near sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham. The meek, gentle sacrifice who at the same time is the fierce defender of the flock, the Good Shepherd.

In Our Lord's time on Earth, the day before Passover, the priests of the temple would slaughter the lambs for the Passover Feast. In a large town like Jerusalem, this would equate to tens of thousands even hundreds of thousands of lambs being slaughtered in a very short period of time, beginning in the 6th hour, the same hour Jesus was condemned to death by Pilate. For instance it was recorded that in 70 AD shortly before the Romans destroyed the Temple, the priests offered 256,500 lambs for the Passover meal.

To keep the carcass out of the dirt and in some semblance of order they would hang the lamb on a vertical pole, with a horizontal piece of wood through each foreleg and tie both pieces of wood together. In other words, they hung the lamb that had been sacrificed and was going to become a sacrificial meal on a cross. Then at evening time, the men would gather to collect the lambs for their Passover meal and using the base of the pole, hoist the lamb into the air to carry it home for the women to prepare.

Hundreds of thousands of crucified lambs, being paraded through the streets to become sacrificial meals. Less than 24 hours later, the Lamb of God, being paraded through the same streets, carrying his cross on the way to be crucified to complete our Passover and the sacrificial meal he made of himself in the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper.

So how does the meek, helpless, gentle lamb who does not have any visible means of defense stand at the same time as the fierce warrior shepherd who boasts in today's gospel that his sheep know his voice, will never be lost, and that they will have eternal life. How can that work, where is the logic to back the boast?

It works because the real battle isn't on the physical plain; it is waged on the spiritual plain. Of course we have terrorism and a culture of death to confront on the physical plain and physical action is required to confront those evils.

However, even though physical action may win some battles, by itself it can't win the war. To win the war we need to engage on the spiritual plain, we need to join our voices to the heavenly hosts and ask the Good Shepherd of our souls for his assistance because we can't win this spiritual war by ourselves.

In the reading from the Book of Revelations today a great multitude is praising the Lamb of God, our Good Shepherd on the throne. These are the Saints in heaven, too numerous to count, the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham to make his offspring in faith more numerous than the stars in the sky and grains of sand on the shores of the sea. This is the Church Triumphant; we are the Church Militant, the souls in Purgatory, the Church Penitent, one Holy and Apostolic Church.

They have been washed in the 'blood of the lamb'. In Baptism we have been gathered into his death and washed in the 'blood of the lamb'. Our prayers join with theirs at the foot of God's throne.

In 2002, then Pope, now Saint John Paul II said that; "the flock is threatened" called for "spiritual combat" to ward off the evils of this age. He asked for men and women of faith to join him in prayer to turn the word from a culture of death back to God and the culture of life. He called for prayer warriors to help wage the war between good and evil on the spiritual plain. He also admonished us numerous times during his pontificate using the words of Jesus and the Angels, "Do not be afraid".

But how many of us are afraid? Afraid to be ridiculed, afraid of harassment by society and possible persecution by the very same authorities we elected to protect our religious liberty? When we are afraid, we need to trust in God and recognize that our troubles are minor. In the United States religious persecution has been limited to harassment and confiscation of property. In many other parts of the world, particularly in the Middle East, Catholics are being sold into slavery and crucified every day for their faith.

And then there are the discouraged. At least 3 times in the past 3 weeks someone some one has told me that they were praying, but gave it up when God didn't do what they wanted, when they wanted.

Setting the obvious issue of hubris aside, being a prayer warrior isn't for the faint of heart. This isn't rear-echelon stuff; it is pure special operations combat. High risk, high gain, executed with integrity of heart, with an eye to the long game acknowledging that to achieve the desired end effect it may take generations of effort, with numerous set-backs. But in the final analysis, the end effect, our salvation, the salvation of our families and even the salvation of entire world is worth the effort and the sacrifice.

Every mass we stand before the throne of heaven where Jesus is hailed forever as the Lamb of God. Every time we pray we join our voices to the heavenly multitude at the foot of that very same throne. Every song of praise, every song of joy, every simple lifting of the heart adds to the heavenly chorus.

We have been given so much, our lives are blessed in so many ways and in return all God asks is for us to listen to his voice, do as he asks, trust in him, his wisdom, his love, and keep on praying.