



Lenten Reflections for EOHSJ

Fourth Sunday of Lent

2021

(Laetare Sunday)

Reflection by Rev. Msgr. Laurence Spiteri

Readings: 2 Chronicles 36:14-16, 19-23; Psalm 137:1-2-6; Ephesians 2:4-10; John 3:14-21

Today's Scripture readings speak to us about twins. Their names are Shepherd and Walker. Their parents are God the Father and Mother Church. They also speak to us about their children – a rebellious and deaf crowd. Their number falls beyond the measure of counting.

The two Books of Chronicles cover some 550 years of the history of the Jewish people, starting with the death of Saul, their first king, down to the return of faithful Jews from the Babylonian Exile. The original parents of these people, as is the case with us, are identified in the Book of Genesis – Adam and Eve, but the source of their Jewish race are the great Patriarch Abraham and his wife Sarah who were chosen and set aside by God to become the parents of many nations. A specific branch of their descents were the elected People of God, the Jews. These were usually very rebellious, sinful, counterfeited their allegiance to an all-knowing and most loving Father. But, God was madly in love with His chosen children and many a time He closed His eyes to their unfaithful and mistrusting behavior. Yet, they had to be brought back into line and God did so by loosening their ties with their land, the Promised Land, and let them be taken to a foreign land, Babylon, a land alien to both the Jews and to their God, and there purified of their sinfulness. God acts like the first of our twins: like a shepherd God goes to recover the lost sheep and carries it on His shoulders, bringing it back to His land of promise where the sheep would be nurtured, nourished, and safe. This is revealed in the sacred history found in Chronicles.

Our second twin is the Walker. A walker needs walking shoes. The profession and talent of a cobbler is practically lost in the States. The greatest majority of shoes are factory-made. But a cobbler goes to great lengths to produce shoes. He measures each foot, he pencils around each foot to discover its unique shape, he takes into account the way our foot is shaped, and so forth. In other words, he wants to produce a pair of shoes that are a perfect fit. God the Father does this through the Old Testament teachings presented by prophets and saintly women and men. Then, when the shoes are produced in the fullness of time, God fits them into the feet of His Divine Son and tells Him to walk the earth ... to walk among us, His rebellious children. Jesus Christ walks our walk, covers the same terrain that our feet cover, and as the Gospel reading indicates, Jesus lights up the path that has been darkened by sin, including our sins. And this Walker and the Shepherd are one and the same in Jesus Christ.

Pope Francis has frequently said to bishops and priests to acquire the smell of the fold of the sheep entrusted to them; to smell like their sheep. But sheep have a repulsive and very distinct smell. So, Pope Francis must not be referring to the smell identified through our noses. He is referring to another kind of smell. It is one which entails suffering, anxiety, fear, heartache, disillusionment, feeling scandalized, broken promises and lives, anything that wounds us, the sheep. He directs our spiritual leaders to identify with such smells, in other words, not to be bystanders but to feel the burden of such sufferings and walk their walk in the shoes of our spiritual life. However, I would venture to say that this does not only apply to bishops and priests but to all Christians. All of us are called to practice a virtuous and holy life, helping those in need, at times carrying them a step further to recovery, to console, to be compassionate, to forgive, and ultimately, to provide them with a loving service. All of us are challenged to do so today, especially during this dark time of the reign of the Coronavirus. St. Paul reminds us in the second reading of the source of our fraternal service: the gift of faith which our Heavenly Father has freely bestowed upon each and every one of us, His beloved children.

Like the Jews in Chronicles, we have sinned, counterfeited our selfish love and ego by claiming them as being Christ-like, strayed from meeting the needs of those sisters and brothers who reach out to us for help, exchanged Christian values for the allurements of the world, and doubted our Heavenly Father's love and care for His children. But we are reminded that Jesus is the Good Shepherd who seeks us out to pick us up, place us on His shoulders, and bring us back to the sacred land of God, the sanctuary of God where Jesus is fully present in the Eucharist, and there we are forgiven, nourished, nurtured, bonded with our brothers and sisters as members of Mother Church, and hear His words: "*Do not be afraid for I am with you always until the end of time.*" (Matthew 28:20) This is the fountain that gives us reason to rejoice – *laetare*.

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