

## **John 10:11-18<sup>v vi</sup>**

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.”

---

### **<sup>v</sup> About the Gospel: John 10:11-18**

*In the Old Testament, God is called the Shepherd of Israel, as is David or the Davidic Messiah. Today's reading develops the figure of the shepherd of the sheep. Jesus is "the good shepherd" (v. 11). The word good more literally means "beautiful," as in an ideal of perfection. Here it might be rendered as model. Jesus is the model shepherd, both because of his willingness to lay down his life and because of his intimate knowledge of his flock.*

*The intimacy between the shepherd and his flock parallels that between the Father and the Son. The purpose of this mutual knowledge is to bring Jesus' followers, both the flock of Israel and the Gentile flocks, into union with him and with one another.*

### **<sup>vi</sup> Reflection and Response**

---

In today's readings, we meet with an image that can be difficult to understand. The metaphor of the shepherd has at times been sentimentalized and at other times abused.

Given that tension, what can we learn from today's gospel? One of its most heartening aspects is the utter commitment of the Shepherd. Some of us might resent being diminished by the comparison to witless sheep. Yet all of us can respond with gratitude to a committed friend. The special people in our lives who know when we need a joke or a nudge, a compliment or a challenge; those who can both laugh and cry with us; those who give us perspective when we've lost ours: they are gift. To have as guide One who is the source and inspiration of all those gifts is blessing indeed.

We have been fortunate in our own day to see models lay down their lives for others. Martyrs in Central America and Africa are dramatic examples. Yet in unspectacular ways, ordinary people sacrifice daily for their children, their coworkers, their friends and relatives. Laying down one's own life may be as simple as pausing to hear the leisurely unfolding of another person's story when time pressures mount. Or it may be as complex as financing another's education. But the surrenders we can observe so often around us prove that giving one's life is both possible and practical.

A second noteworthy element is the lack of coercion exerted by the Shepherd. His voice is all, and it is enough. We often meet with resistance when we try to persuade another. We also witness the remarkable change that inner motivation can produce. Jesus knows well the drawing power of love and the strength of people driven by love.

Quietly consider:

Who in my circles longs to hear the Shepherd's voice,  
and can hear it only through me?