



Cavanis Lay Fraternity
Sacred Heart House, CAVANIS INSTITUTE
Via Col Draga - Possagno (TV)

INVISIBLE MONASTERY 02nd May 2024

Dear friends,

May 2, the date on which, as the congregation's religious solemnly renew their vows, we strengthen the bonds that bind us to the beloved Congregation of the Schools of Charity, is a truly singular occasion to look back on our experience as the Cavanis Lay Fraternity and to obtain from the mercy of the Risen Lord the graces necessary for our journey. We are helped in this frame of mind by the readings of the Fourth Sunday of Easter, the Sunday of the "Good Shepherd". Among the similes found in the Fourth Gospel through which the mystery of Christ is revealed to us, certainly that of the good shepherd (literally or *kalòs*, "the beautiful one") communicates a wealth of surprising nuances. It is an image that is rooted in a long biblical tradition and, at the same time, moves within a familiar, everyday context, at least for a nomadic society such as the Jewish one was. What is astonishing in the way Jesus self-presents himself through the shepherd image is the exclusivity of this role: I am (an expression that introduces other Johannine images). Jesus is the only truly good shepherd; indeed, he is the shepherd, the one whom the prophets announced. Indeed, in the texts of Is 40:11, Ez 34:1-18, Jer 23:1-4, the Shepherd is the providential God who guides human history, who is attentive to man's fate to draw him out of a kingdom of darkness and lead him to a place of light and peace; he is the God who leads his people, who does not put up with shepherds who shepherd themselves, do not care for the flock and scatter it; he is the God who gathers the flock with his arm and who "carries the lambs on his breast and gently leads the mother sheep" (Is 40:11). These wonderful images used by the prophets to express the greatness and tenderness of God's love, the mutual knowledge and fellowship between God and his people, find their fulfillment in the one who calls himself the good shepherd. Speaking before the Sanhedrin, Peter, calling Jesus the cornerstone, may say, "in no one else is to be found salvation; for there is no other name under heaven given to men in which it is appointed that we should be saved". Jesus is the shepherd who "lays down his life for the sheep." This is the radical commitment of the good shepherd, the act of his unconditional dedication. Jesus, again, is the shepherd who "knows his sheep and his sheep know him." The good shepherd's gift of himself expresses and implements that deep relationship of knowledge that exists between him and his sheep. It is a knowledge of love, personal, unrepeatable; it makes possible to penetrate the mystery of each one, to recognize each other through the timbre of the voice. But this knowledge has a model and a source: it is the communion of life, that relationship of total belonging between Jesus and the Father. And finally, Jesus is the good shepherd because his love is not selective and discriminating. Rather, it is boundless: "I have other sheep that do not come from this fold; those too I must lead." The flock that the good shepherd leads does not have a closed number: it is open, in it there are no distinctions. In the heart of this good shepherd dwells a single concern: to save every sheep, to lead them back to unity from the place of dispersion. Jesus' gift of life thus has as its goal and effective result the gathering into unity of the dispersed: "they will become one flock and one shepherd." Contemplating this Johannine icon, it comes naturally to react with the words of 1John 3,1: "see what great love the Father has given us to be called children of God, and we really are. Of this love we have had a singular harvest of evidence, in the affection of our loved ones, in the solidarity of those who have shared the path or even a stretch of the road with us, in the Christian community to which we belong, and also we must be frank to say it - in this our FLC. It has been for us a sign of God's tenderness through which we have been guided (and still are!), as beloved sheep of his flock, along the path of fidelity to the charism.

From the holy gospel according to Saint John (10:11-18)

“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.”

Rest Calmly in Providence, in Thoughts to the Epistolary of the Venerable Founders, Fr. Anthony and Fr. Mark Cavanis, edited by Fr. Ugo Del Debbio and Fr. Pierluigi Pennacchi, General Curia Cavanis Institute, VENICE 1994, part II, no. 177

You see then that I toil as much as I can, but if so far I have not succeeded what is there to say? I for myself say 'mea culpa,' and then I console myself with that beautiful sentence of Divine Scripture that you remind me of in your dearest letter 9 corr.te: "Omnem sollicitudinem projicientes in eum, quoniam Ipsi cura est de nobis." Let us trust in the Lord that surely the excellent Father will help us. I am by God's grace sound and tranquil, and I rejoice to hear that you also stand firm in trust, and rest quietly in divine Providence. So many Masses celebrated for the Institute, and so many visits to the Shrines, and so many of your prayers will certainly have a most happy outcome. (PMA. IV,131).

