



Greetings from St. Michael and St. Gabriel parishes,

Above is a picture taken in Medjugorje of a shepherd leading his flock to pasture. Every morning, they would pass by my apartment balcony on their way towards Cross Mountain, where a relic of the Cross of the Good Shepherd rests. They would return later in the day to a little farm nearby in a process that has repeated itself in this area for over a thousand years. One time our paths crossed, we exchanged polite smiles, he the shepherd to his flock, I to mine.

The reflection this week looks at what it's like to be a shepherd in the church these days and considers the example given to us from the Good Shepherd who takes care of us all.

May his blessings be upon you,

Fr. John

The Good Shepherd...

People often ask me what it is like to be a priest. It is something that I am usually too busy being one to have time to think about it. My day usually starts before dawn with a couple of hours of prayer and contemplation. Then by eight or nine I begin my schedule for the day, which can be anything from shoveling snow to listening to heartfelt confessions or presiding over a mass for 1,400 high school students.

My schedule is determined by the dozens of emails, phone calls, and people that I encounter each day. From hospital and home visits with the sick and dying to arranging contract work for one of the many church properties and buildings that I take care of. There is never a moment where there isn't something that beckons my attention, but there are moments of peace and encouragement along the way.

Beyond the busyness of travelling around the five hundred square kilometers of my parish boundaries, there are the spiritual rigors of being "all things to all people" as one of my predecessors once put it. Being emotionally involved in people's lives when they need a helping hand can take its toll sometimes. Most people who ask me for help, ask me to ask God to help them. Being a priest is being a mediator between people and God. Most times these requests come from parishioners I know well, but increasingly it is people who approach me in public because of the collar that I wear. That outward sign of an inner reality that I am not always comfortable to wear. Because along with the friendly smiles also come the sneers and looks of disapproval for being something that I am not.

Yes, there are days when a priest also reaches their limit, where their brain is in a fog, or their body has had enough work for the day. But they keep on going, even though they know that they are not at their best, because they know that doing a little bit of good is better than none at all. Then there are days when nothing seems to go right. You wake up late and still tired from the day before and nothing seems to go well. These are the days when you struggle to the finish line and

collapse in bed hoping that the next tomorrow will be different, and thankfully it usually is.

Jesus is our example of what a good shepherd is like. He is the perfect example of being our mediator with God. He always says yes to God and no to anything that tempts him otherwise. He makes all the right decisions and does all the right things, even though they do not always seem that way to us. He does what his heart compels him to do because he loves us with the greatest of love that is beyond all telling.

We often feel abandoned, as the first disciples did, when Jesus lay silent on the cross. We think like they did, that he is no more, that our shepherd has abandoned us, but just like it was them and is now for us, Jesus always goes before us into the unknown to prepare a safe path for us to follow.

We all are priests, mediators between God and those around us. We are all called to be good shepherds of the people and the things entrusted to us. Caring for each other and the world that doesn't always feel like they are returning the favour. Loving and forgiving as best we can and asking for help and forgiveness from God when we can't. This is where Jesus, the Good Shepherd waits for us, to embrace us and guide us as children of God, with the same eternal love that created us, here now and always.

May this peace be with you always,

Fr. John