

22. February 2020

**"Shepherds after God's own heart"**

Feast of Cathedra Petri

*1 Petr 5,1-4*

*I urge the elders among you, as a fellow-elder myself and a witness to the sufferings of Christ, and as one who is to have a share in the glory that is to be revealed: give a shepherd's care to the flock of God that is entrusted to you: watch over it, not simply as a duty but gladly, as God wants; not for sordid money, but because you are eager to do it. Do not lord it over the group which is in your charge, but be an example for the flock. When the chief shepherd appears, you will be given the unfading crown of glory.*

Shepherds like those described in the reading are the ones we wish to have in our Church!

Shepherding God's flock is an honorable service and one of great responsibility; it is a task that profoundly unites the shepherd with the Supreme Shepherd of humanity. No doubt it is a service that involves many efforts; but it is the grace of God that gives the strength to bear the crosses and setbacks of such a task, and to grow through them.

This counts for all the pastors of the Church, including the Successor of Peter, who is called to exercise universal service for the Church, with the same attitude as all the other pastors: willingly and from the heart.

Charity makes this attitude possible!

Just as a mother usually devotes herself without complaint to the sacrificial task of educating her children, and in all situations she is motivated by that love that God has poured in mothers, so too must the shepherds of God's flock live from the love for Him who has entrusted His sheep to them.

While a mother's love is strongly linked to her nature, the shepherd's service has a more supernatural character, which continually needs prayer to nourish itself and reconnect with God.

The concept of voluntary service is contrasted with that of forced service.

It may happen that some shepherds are called to tasks which are far from their ideas and do not correspond to their inclinations. But there is a way of transforming a situation that is not freely experienced at first, if it is a call from God. This is the way of obedience.

If it is a question of a special vocation, it will surely help to always remember the One who calls; to enter into an intimate dialogue with Him; to give to God all the lacks of freedom, all the ideas that still tie us down... Then, that inner freedom, that is necessary to assume and interiorize a call, will grow.

In such a journey, the perspective with which we contemplate the task received will also change. What before seemed to be oppressive is seen in a new light, because the grace of God, to which one has opened oneself, begins to act.

In this way the inclination and understanding grows, for example, how a pastoral ministry should be led. The more one can free oneself from one's own person and its demands, the more grace can act. And it is this grace that will show us that the flock entrusted to us needs an example; that the flock must be guided with wisdom; and that it is not right that the sheep should suffer under the character of a shepherd who has not been purified.

But this is also connected with the call for the Christian community to pray for its shepherds. I remember that Pope Francis repeatedly asked for prayer for him, and so our bishops and priests and other Church leaders should also be present in our constant prayer.

The greater their task, the more prayer they need; and even more so if it is seen that they are in danger of not assuming their mission correctly.