

22. February 2022

**Feast of the Cathedra Petri  
Shepherds after God's own heart**

1 Pet 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 the ones described in this reading are the ones we wish to have in our Church! Shepherding God's flock is an honourable and responsible service; a task that deeply unites the shepherd with the Supreme Shepherd of humanity. No doubt it is a service that involves much effort; but it is the grace of God that sustains him and gives him the strength to bear the crosses and setbacks of such a mission, and to grow through them.

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

Love makes it possible!

Just as a mother is often uncomplainingly devoted to the self-sacrificing task of bringing up her children, and in all situations is motivated by that love which God has placed in mothers, so too the shepherds of God's flock are to live out of 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, constantly requiring prayer to be nourished and reconnected to God.

It is striking that in the reading St. Peter exhorts to serve willingly and voluntarily, not by force.

It can happen that certain pastors are given tasks that are far from what they would have imagined or desired, and which do not correspond at all to their tastes.

But when it is a call from God, there is a way to transform a situation which, at first sight, might seem forced and not freely chosen: it is the way of obedience. If it is a question of a special vocation, it will certainly help to always remember who the One who calls is; to enter into an intimate dialogue with Him; to hand over to God all the lack of freedom, all the ideas or illusions that still bind us... Then, that inner freedom that is necessary to assume and interiorise a call will grow.

Through such a journey, the perspective from which we look at the task we have received will also change. What seemed oppressive before will be seen in a new light, because God's grace, to which one has opened oneself, will begin to become effective.

In this way, love for the task entrusted to you will also grow, and the wisdom to know how to exercise a ministry such as, for example, that of a pastor. The more one is able to detach oneself from oneself and one's expectations, the more grace will be able to act. And it is this grace that shows us that the flock entrusted to us needs an example; that it must be led with wisdom; and that it is not right that the sheep should suffer under the character of a shepherd who has not been sufficiently purified.

All this should also be a call for the Christian community to pray for their pastors. All those who bear responsibility in the Church need to be present in our prayer. The greater their task, the more they need prayer; and all the more so if they are in danger of not carrying out their mission properly.