

27. December

**Third day of the Christmas Octave
"The shepherds"**

The shepherds in the fields of Bethlehem rejoiced at the Angel's announcement and hurried to find the Child. They are simple people, and in the simplicity of their hearts they understand the importance of the message they have received; they must have been overwhelmed by the sublime event in the grotto of Bethlehem!

*"And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who will govern my people Israel." (Mt 2:6).*

Simple people understand with their hearts and do not need complex reasoning to discern the truth. When we think of them, Pascal's saying comes to mind: The heart has its reasons which reason knows nothing of.

God often looks for such people and entrusts them with important messages. Sometimes He even chooses children! The simplicity of the heart prevents the message from being clouded by the complexity that can come from the "self".

The shepherds are the first to go to the King Who is born, and they are the first to bear witness to Him. They are simple shepherds whose task is to look after the flocks entrusted to them.

What a significant message! The Shepherd of humanity, the Good Shepherd, calls the shepherds who are in the fields to make them sharers in the great gift that is His presence among men.

Thus the shepherds are among the first to receive the Good News, as we read in the Gospel of St Luke:

The angel said to the shepherds, *"Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."* (Lk 2:10-11).

The first to know that the Son of God has been born are not the rulers of this world or the religious leaders, but simple people. And this simplicity will characterise the whole history of evangelisation.

Shepherds are bearers of the joy of heaven! First they are recipients of the message, but then they themselves become heralds of joy. In fact, the recipients of the Good News are called to become shepherds for others.

The great model is the Good Shepherd Himself: He lays down His life for His sheep (cf. Jn 10:11). In the image of the shepherd and his flock, something of the nature of God is communicated to us. He Himself comes into the world to lead His own to green pastures, to free them from the chains of sin and to snatch them from the clutches of the devil.

Those who have received and welcomed the Good News are now entrusted with the service of shepherds, so that they may become the bearers of this message, having come in haste to worship God: The Shepherd of mankind has come into the world! All men must hear of this!

Rejoice, for a Saviour is born to you! Did you already know this? Did you know that God Himself came into the world to lead all men back home?

In Him you will find green pastures; in Him you will have protection from the powers of evil; in Him you will always have the certainty of being loved. Did you already know this?

This message is old, but it is always new. Many have not yet heard it; others have forgotten it; others do not understand it well; others are not interested in it; others have gone astray...

And what does the Shepherd do? He searches for each of His sheep!