



23. February 2026
LENTEN SPIRITUAL RETREAT

Day 6: “God is the good shepherd and invites us to imitate Him”

Today, on the sixth day of our Lenten journey, we hear comforting words. God Himself, who is our shepherd, assures us that He will take care of His sheep. Although the words of the prophet Ezekiel in today's reading (Ezekiel 34:11–16), in which divine goodness is manifested in a special way, are addressed primarily to the people of Israel, they also extend to all people living in dispersion. May they hear the Lord's words of comfort:

“Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the crippled, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will watch over; I will feed them in justice.” (Ezekiel 34:15-16)

Here we encounter the saving will of our Father, who spares no effort to bring people back to His home. He wants to indulge them with His love, feed them in fertile pastures, and, as in the parable of the prodigal son, celebrate a great feast when one of them finds the way back to Him.

We must deeply assimilate in our hearts this love that God has for all people. In this way, it becomes a source of life and a hope capable of sustaining us even in the face of so much evil and confusion that we see in the world—things that distance people from God and lead them into dispersion. It is urgent to speak to people about our good Father, who desires to give meaning and fruitfulness to their lives on earth.

In addition to proclaiming the love of God, which even took human form in His Son Jesus Christ, today's Gospel presents us with another requirement for being His authentic disciples. The value of our faith must be manifested in the concrete actions we call “works of mercy.” At the Last Judgment, to which all peoples will be subjected, we will be asked to give an account of them. This is what the Gospel tells us:

“When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats” (Mt 25:31–32).

This passage shows us that the Lord identifies with the poor to such an extent that whatever we do “for one of these least brothers,” we do for Him. This is a magnificent invitation, not only to free ourselves from an unfavorable sentence at the judgment, but

also to serve the Lord Himself through our love and care for the poor and needy, just as He does for us. Not surprisingly, God points out again and again that “true fasting” consists precisely in taking care of those most in need.

In this context, I would like to share a small personal anecdote. In 1998, I traveled to Calcutta and, while visiting Mother Teresa's tomb, I expressed a request related to this topic. I knew that she had served Jesus in the poorest and most needy and that this aspect was essential to the spirituality of her order. At that time, this perspective was still somewhat foreign to me. So I asked Mother Teresa to help me discover this dimension of faith.

Afterwards, I visited one of the hospices she had founded. I saw many poor and sick people, and the truth is that I didn't really know what I could do for them, since I didn't even understand their language. I felt a little helpless and out of place. Then I approached one of the assistants, and she led me to a man who looked emaciated. We agreed that I could give him a massage. I was happy with this solution, because it was something I knew how to do well. At first, it was just a normal massage for me, but then the situation changed inwardly. I was able to understand from within the words of the Lord in today's Gospel: *“Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me”* (Mt 25:40). Mother Teresa had heard my request!

Today we can easily establish a connection between the reading and the Gospel. Our Father, as a good shepherd, wants to shower all people with His blessings, both natural and supernatural. At the same time, He wants us to do the same for others, each in the place where we have been placed. In this way, we take on, in a certain sense, the role of shepherds for those who need it most. People must experience God's love through our service. And we, for our part, understand more and more that God's love wants to reach especially those who need it most. By serving them and showing them our love, we also serve and love God.

When we meditate on the Word of God, whatever the passage may be, we always encounter the great mystery of God's love, which encompasses all areas of life and surrounds us constantly. Allowing ourselves to be loved by Him, responding to His love, and sharing it with others is a wonderful work to which the Lord invites us in a special way during this season of Lent.

The flower of today's meditation is to internalize how God feeds His sheep as a good shepherd and to place ourselves at His service by taking care of all the people He entrusts to us.

Meditation on the reading of the day: <https://en.elijamission.net/2019/03/11/>

Meditation on the Gospel of the day: <https://en.elijamission.net/judged-in-love/>