

**HOMILY OF ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE, APOSTOLIC NUNCIO
CATHOLIC CHARITIES CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION, ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO
HOLY NAME CATHEDRAL, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
4TH SUNDAY OF EASTER, MAY 7, 2017**

Today, on this Fourth Sunday of Easter, we celebrate Good Shepherd Sunday. The Lord is our Shepherd. He is the gate through which we must enter to find our salvation. In the Church, the Lord set Peter over the College of Apostles to strengthen them and the entire flock in unity and feed them. As the Apostolic Nuncio, the Successor of Saint Peter's personal representative in this country, I wish to express his spiritual closeness and gratitude to all of you as you celebrate the 100th Anniversary of Catholic Charities here in the Archdiocese of Chicago. I thank Cardinal Cupich, the Shepherd of your local Church, for his kind invitation. I thank each of you for your humble service and generosity toward the poor.

Today, we contemplate Christ as the Good Shepherd. Our Gospel concludes with the words: "*I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly.*" (John 10:10). Of course, the life that Jesus promises is not necessarily a life of material well-being or a life of ease, but it is a life that involves friendship with Him which leads to eternal life. He is the Good Shepherd who seeks out the lost and wounded sheep and rejoices in finding him, putting him on his own shoulders! He is the one who calls his sheep by name. In love, he feeds and nourishes his flock.

Naturally, the image of bishops and priests comes to mind, as exercising a shepherding function. We must pray that they may preserve in their service of the flock, having hearts formed after the heart of the Lord. During the Jubilee Year for Mercy, Pope Francis said that:

A shepherd after the heart of God has a heart sufficiently free to set aside his own concerns. He does not live by calculating his gains or how long he has worked: he is not an accountant of the Spirit, but a Good Samaritan who seeks out those in need. For the flock, he is a shepherd, not an inspector, and he devotes himself to the mission not fifty or sixty percent, but with all he has. ... He does not stop when disappointed and he does not yield to weariness. Indeed, he is stubborn in doing good, anointed with the divine obstinacy that loses sight of no one." (Homily, Feast of the Sacred Heart, 3 June 2016)

What the Holy Father says of priests could be said for every Christian. Parents are shepherds of their children. Siblings look out for one another in a family. Teachers too live this spirituality in tirelessly instructing their students, guiding them in the ways of wisdom. As Catholics, we have a special duty to seek out the poor, a duty which you at Catholic Charities have been fulfilling. Like Christ the Good Shepherd you desire that they might have life and have life abundantly.

In contemplating the Heart of the Good Shepherd, we recognize that there is special place for the poor in the Heart of God, so much so that he himself became poor (2 Cor 8:9). In *Evangeli Gaudium*, Pope Francis points out that the preferential option for the poor is principally a theological category, as God shows the poor his first mercy, and that "This divine preference has consequences for the faith life of all Christians since we are called to have 'this mind ... which was in Jesus Christ.'" (*Evangeli Gaudium*, 198).

The option for the poor is not to mere social activism; rather, animated by the Holy Spirit, it is a loving attentiveness – "the beginning of a true concern for their person which inspires me

effectively to seek their good.” (EG, 199) Jesus, the Good Shepherd, loves the poor. He came to seek them out, not for his good, but for their good and to glorify His Father. The Pope encourages us not only “to find Christ in the poor, to lend our voices to their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them, and to embrace the mysterious wisdom the God wishes to share with us through them.” (EG, 198)

As shepherds, we must also be attentive to the spiritual needs of the flock. In a very personal way, Pope Francis writes: “*I want to say, with regret, that the worst discrimination which the poor suffer is the lack of spiritual care. The great majority of the poor have a special openness to the faith; they need God and we must not fail to offer them his friendship. ...*” (EG, 200)

Jesus came that they may have life – true life with Him includes a spiritual life. In that sense, our works of mercy and charity in building a culture of life should lead to the One who promises us fullness of life. Catholic Charities has existed and exists to evangelize. The primary reason for evangelizing is the love of Jesus which we have received, which comes forth from the Heart of the Good Shepherd. How could we not speak of the One who first loved us by our words and our deeds?

In union with Jesus, the Good Shepherd, we seek what He seeks. We love what He loves. Jesus loves the poor. He loves them as children of His Father. Pope Francis notes: “In the end, what we are seeking is the glory of the Father; we live and we act ‘for the praise of his glorious grace’.” (EG, 267)

As missionary disciples of the Lord Jesus, we follow the Chief Shepherd, not only in seeking His Father’s glory, but also in loving our neighbors, the spiritual force drawing us to union with God. Pope Benedict XVI pointed out that “closing our eyes to our neighbor also blinds us to God” and that “love is, in the end, the only light which can always illuminate a world grown dim and give us the courage needed to keep living and working.” (*Deus Caritas Est*, 16)

My brothers and sisters, you know all too well the darkness of our world and of this great city – the tremendous poverty, hunger, and violence. You know the fear and loneliness in which many immigrants, many of whom are poor, are forced to live. It is your love – our love – Catholic Charity – that will illumine this city. Do not be discouraged in the face of challenges; rather *be stubborn in doing good!* Imitate Christ the Good Shepherd, who gave his very life for his flock.

Continue to be joyful missionary disciples in the midst of the flock, taking to heart the words of the Holy Father:

I am a mission on this earth; that is the reason why I am in the world. We have to regard ourselves as sealed, even branded, by this mission of bringing light, blessing, enlivening, raising up, healing and freeing. (EG, 273)

God calls you to be part of this mission – to share in the mission of His Son, the Good Shepherd – so *that they might have life and have it more abundantly.*