Hope After Abortion

A reading from the Gospel of Luke (15:1-7).

The tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to listen to Jesus,
but the Pharisees and scribes began to complain, saying, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."
So Jesus addressed this parable to them.
"What man among you having a hundred sheep and losing one of them
would not leave the ninety-nine in the desert
and go after the lost one until he finds it?
And when he does find it,
he sets it on his shoulders with great joy
and, upon his arrival home,
he calls together his friends and neighbors and says to them,
'Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep.'
I tell you, in just the same way
there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents
than over ninety-nine righteous people
who have no need of repentance."

Let us reflect...

The figure of the shepherd is a central image used throughout Scripture. Traditionally, shepherds were wholly entrusted to care for and protect the sheep of their flock. The shepherd guarded the sheep day and night from robbers, thieves, and wolves, requiring them to live in the fields among the sheep and often isolated from the community.

Shepherds were seen as poor and lowly, living on the margins of society. Yet despite their humble status, they devoted their entire lives to the constant care of the flock, often enduring harsh conditions and danger, putting their own lives at risk to defend and tend to the sheep.

In the Gospels, Jesus tells us, *"I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me"* (Jn 10:14). Because the shepherd lives his life among the flock, the sheep know the familiar sound of his voice, allowing them to trust and follow the shepherd who calls them by name.

In contrast to the Good Shepherd, Jesus tells us that, *"A hired man, who is not a shepherd and whose sheep are not his own, sees a wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away, and the wolf catches and scatters them"* (Jn 10:12). But the Good Shepherd never abandons his flock. The "essential trait" of the Good Shepherd is that he lays down his life for the sheep, symbolizing Christ himself who offers his very life for us on the Cross.[1]

The Prophet Ezekiel tells us, *"For thus says the Lord God: Look! I myself will search for my sheep and examine them...I will deliver them from every place where they are scattered on the day of dark clouds...I myself will pasture my sheep; I myself will give them rest....The lost I will search out, the strays I will bring back, the injured I will bind up, and the sick I will heal" (Ez 34:11-12, 15,16).*

When we have lost our way and find ourselves brought low by sin and suffering, we can know with

confidence that the Lord will never abandon us. No matter what sins we have committed or how many times we have chosen to separate ourselves from the flock, we can know that Christ's mercy and kindness await us. There is nothing we can do, no sin so great, that cannot be overcome with the infinite mercy of Christ. Jesus searches for us when we are lost and our lives seem to be consumed by the darkness. As Pope Benedict XVI reminded us, Christ "never tires of coming to meet us, he is always the first to set out on the path that separates us from him."[2]

As the Good Shepherd, God will leave the ninety-nine to seek us out and bring us back to Himself. And when he finds us—lost, hurt, hungry, alone, full of shame, without hope—he picks us up, lays us upon his shoulders, and, with joy, carries us to safe pastures. When we are too weak to lift ourselves up, we can find comfort in the strong shoulders of the Good Shepherd bearing us home. We need only to listen for the voice of the shepherd, tenderly calling us by name, repent, and ask the Lord to free us from our sin.

God desires to take the greatest of sinners and transform them into the greatest of saints. No sin is beyond his mercy. He makes "*all things new*" (Rev 21:5). This is why there is more rejoicing over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine who have no need of repentance.

When we arrive safely home, the shepherd calls together his friends and neighbors to celebrate his joy in our return. All of Heaven rejoices in our homecoming, because once we were lost, but now we have been found.

Therefore, because of God's unwavering mercy, we can proclaim, *"The LORD is my shepherd;/ there is nothing I lack./ In green pastures he makes me lie down;/ to still waters he leads me;/ he restores my soul./ He guides me along right paths/ for the sake of his name./ Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,/ I will fear no evil, for you are with me;/ your rod and your staff comfort me"* (Ps 23:1-4).

Often one may feel as though they have committed the 'unforgivable sin' and it's easy for them to think that mercy and forgiveness is for other people, and that God could never want them. Please know that the Church is here to offer you the endless mercy and forgiveness that our Lord has for you. Even in your darkest moments, He desires you. His mercy awaits you in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Project Rachel Ministry is a confidential ministry of the Catholic Church that offers God's mercy, hope and healing to those who have been involved in abortion.

If you or someone you know is suffering after an abortion experience, confidential, non-judgmental help is available from Project Rachel Ministry. Visit the "Find Help" map on HopeAfterAbortion.org to find your nearest diocesan Project Rachel Ministry.

May Christ's peace be with you.

[1] Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, April 29, 2012: https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20120429_ordinazioni.html.
[2] Pope Benedict XVI, Angelus, September 12, 2010: https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/angelus/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_ang_20100912.html.

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