

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. (Ps 23[22]:1).

Psalm 23 is one of the best known and most loved psalms. It is both a canticle of trust and a joyful profession of faith expressed by someone who belongs to the people of Israel. Through the prophets, the Lord has promised to be their shepherd. The psalmist expresses his personal happiness because he knows that he is protected in the Temple,¹ a place of refuge and grace, but also, drawing on his experience, he wants to encourage others to have confidence in the presence of the Lord.

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The image of the shepherd and the flock is very dear to all biblical literature. To understand it fully, we must think of the arid and rocky deserts in the Middle East. The shepherd gently guides his flock, for without him they could go astray and die. The sheep must learn to rely on him, listening to his voice. He is their constant companion.

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This psalm invites us to strengthen our intimate relationship with God by experiencing his love. Some may wonder why the author goes so far as to say that 'I lack nothing'? Nowadays the problems and challenges of health, family, work, etc are part of everyday life. In addition, there is the immense suffering experienced by so many of our brothers and sisters due to war, the consequences of climate change, migration, violence, etc.

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Perhaps the key to interpretation lies in the verse where we read "for you are with me" (Ps 23:4). It refers to certainty in the love of a God who always accompanies us and makes us live in a different way. Chiara Lubich wrote: *"It is one thing to know that we can have recourse to a Being who exists, who has mercy on us, who has paid for our sins, and quite another to live and feel ourselves at the centre of God's predilection, with the consequent banishment*

of all the fears that hold us back, of all loneliness, of all sense of orphanhood and all uncertainty... Men and women can know they are loved and believe in this love with all their being. They can surrender to it trustingly and follow it. Everything that happens in life, whether sad or joyful, is enlightened by knowing love has willed or permitted it all."

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Jesus brought this prophecy to fulfilment: in John's Gospel he does not hesitate to call himself the 'good shepherd'. Relationships with this shepherd are personal and intimate in nature. "I am the good shepherd, I know my sheep and my sheep know me" (Jn. 10:14-15). He leads them to the pastures of his Word that is life, particularly the Word that contains the message enclosed in the "new commandment", which, if lived, makes "visible" the presence of the Risen One in the community gathered in his name, in his love.ⁱⁱ

Edited by Augusto Parody Reyes and the Word of Life
Team

iCf Ps. 23:6
iiCF. Matt. 18:20