

The heart of God's message ... trust in God!

Here's a little **Bible trivia** to start your day ...

1. What's the shortest **chapter** in the Bible? **Psalm 117** ... it has only 2 verses!
2. What's the longest **chapter** in the Bible? **Psalm 119** ... it has 176 verses!
3. How many **total chapters** are there in the **73 books of the Bible**? **1,189**
4. What chapter is at the very center of the Bible? It turns out to be **Psalm 118**, because there are 594 chapters that precede it and 594 chapters that follow it.
5. Now **if you add** the **number of chapters** that precede and follow together, you get the number **1188**. And if we read that as **Psalm 118, verse 8**, then we find what God has to say at the very center of **the Bible**, at the very heart of **His word**!

Psalm 118: 8 says: "*It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man.*"

And that's the verse we just prayed in our Responsorial Psalm ... Psalm 118!

This Psalm was written **3000 years ago** and yet ...

it still speaks **the very message** that the **whole world** needs to hear today.

From **the beginning of man's creation** through these days today ...

God has been calling man to do one thing ... **Trust Him!**

But unfortunately, **the World** and **the Evil One** are constantly pushing us
to trust in ourselves ... and to seek our own destiny.

So **this verse** ... that stands at the very heart of God's word ... remains good advice.

"It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man."

And we know that **The Lord** still holds this to be good advice because of the **modern day image** that we have of Him as **Divine Mercy** which includes the words

"Jesus, I trust in you!"

Where does **Jesus** want us to place our trust? **In Him.**

That's the very message that **St. Peter** gives us in our **First Reading** from **Acts** ... where He says, "*there is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven, given to the human race by which we are to be saved.*"

There are many people today who put their trust in other things.
There are many people today who bury themselves in their work
There are many people who are consumed with sports, or hunting or games or TV
There are many who sink into sin ...
such as: adultery, fornication, masturbation, pornography, drugs, alcohol, food, etc

**These are some of the places where people seek refuge
in this **cold** and **challenging world**.**

But Jesus says ... no, take refuge in Him!

**And to encourage us to do this, He gives us a warm and inviting image today
The image of **Himself** as **“The Good Shepherd”**.**

Here we have the famous Warner Sallman painting of Jesus the Good Shepherd.

It's a **gentle** and **soothing image of the Lord** ... with **many sheep gathered around him** ... including a **black sheep** ... and a **tiny lamb being carried in His arms**.

The people of Jesus' time certainly knew the role of a shepherd.
So it had to be most meaningful when Jesus said to them in our Gospel today,
“I am the Good Shepherd.”

This was a **very important statement** for several reasons ...

First of all, it's an “I AM” statement!

Remember the way that God revealed himself to Moses in the Burning Bush ...
He called Himself ... *“I AM who AM”*
And when Moses asked God, *“Who shall I tell the people sent me?”*
God says, *“Tell them ‘I AM’ sent you.”*

So when Jesus uses an ‘I AM’ statement, He's associating himself with God!

Jesus says “I am” 45 times in the Gospel of John!

- **I am The Bread of Life**
- **I am The Light of the World**
- **I am The Gate for the sheep**
- **I am The Way the Truth and the Life**
- **I am the True Vine**

And today he says I am the Good Shepherd.

Notice the adjective “good”

Jesus is not just any shepherd ... He is a ‘Good’ Shepherd ... a description He emphasizes by pointing out that he will not run from trouble ...
but will lay down his life for his Sheep!

And who are his sheep? All of us!

Recall the Resurrected Jesus’ conversation with Peter on the shore after they had the miraculous catch of fish and had eaten.

Jesus asks Peter three times if he loved Him.

And Peter three times affirmed his love for Jesus.

And after each affirmation, Jesus instructed Peter saying,

Feed my Lambs ... Tend my Sheep ... Feed my sheep!

We human beings are the sheep of the Good Shepherd

Peter and subsequent Popes and Bishops and Priests have been given the responsibility of shepherding people to Heaven until the Good Shepherd returns.

So, the **sheep** that Jesus is referring to are **you** and **me**.

We are God’s sheep. And Jesus is the Good Shepherd.

How fortunate we are ... to have a ‘good’ shepherd.

Think of what it’d be like if we didn’t have a good shepherd?

Well, what would it be like if you didn’t have a good boss?

What if your boss was **ruthless** or **condescending** or **overbearing** or **uncaring** or **impatient** or **hot-headed** or **not trustworthy** or **critical** or **impossible to please**?

How would you like to have a boss like that? It would be misery.

What if you sensed your boss was only there for the money and didn’t care about you as a person?

What if they didn’t have your best interests at heart?

Sadly, many people are unhappy with their bosses.

They **moan** and **groan** and **criticize** and **complain** about the things their bosses do.

**Well, what if we had a God who had all the shortcomings of our human bosses?
Then we'd really have something to **be unhappy about!****

Thankfully, we have a very good boss in God, who is **caring** and **trustworthy**.

Jesus points this out in our **Gospel** today when He says that a **hired hand**, who doesn't care about his sheep, sees the **wolf** coming and **runs away!**

Jesus is not a **hired hand**. He is our **Brother** and our **Friend**.

Jesus knows us better than we know ourselves;
He **loves us** and **our children** more than we could ever imagine.

So **when trouble comes** along, He's the **first one in line** to **lend** a helping hand.

Jesus never runs away ... we do!

If **ever** we feel separated from God in our lives, it isn't because Jesus has left us;
rather, it's because we have left Him.

Jesus is the **Good Shepherd**; He is **constantly** looking to keep us together in His fold and He will come after us to bring us back if we ever wander away from Him.

There is **nothing** that **we can do** that is **so bad** that He will ever stop looking for us.

The **best image** of what it means to be a **good shepherd** comes when **Jesus** says,
“*I will lay down my life for my sheep.*” And He **certainly did ... on the Cross** behind
our Banner ... **Jesus gave His life so that we could be saved from death ...**
the **eternal death** of being separated from God in eternity.

Parents can easily understand what it means to be a **good shepherd** just by thinking
of what they would do to protect their child from harm.

Is there **any hardship** that you would not endure for the sake of your child?

No, there's **none!** **Parents** would rather die than to have their child hurt in any way.

Now, if we can have that devotion to our children, **imagine how God looks at us**.

We are God's children. And **God did die** to save all of us!

St. John emphasizes this in our **Second Reading** today saying, “*See what love the
Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. Yet so we are*”

Do you comprehend the **great dignity** we have as His children?

And notice too, that **Jesus** did not say, “*I will lay down my life for my sheep.*”
Rather, He said, “*I will lay down my life for the sheep.*”

Jesus went on to explain, “*I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold.*”
He said, “*These also I must lead and there will be one flock, one shepherd.*”

Jesus, a Jew, came to bring salvation to the Jews first, then the Gentiles.
But sadly the Jews rejected Him as Peter describes in our **First** reading from **Acts**
declaring, “*Jesus is the stone rejected by you, the builders,*
which has become the cornerstone.”

The Jews were “**the Chosen People**” of God for centuries
and they were to be the builders of the Kingdom of God on earth.
But they didn’t acknowledge Jesus as God and so they rejected Him.

Together, we acclaimed this 5 times in our **Response to Psalm 118** saying,
“*The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.*”

**Jesus is *the stone* ... rejected by the Jews ... that has become the cornerstone of the
Christian Church ... **the worldwide household of God.****

You might think, well if I was there back then, I wouldn’t have rejected Jesus!
Well, don’t be so sure.
There’s still a force in the world opposing God and it’s a growing force!

The keynote speaker at Wednesday’s **Quarterly Catholic Luncheon**,
Jennifer Fulwiler, spoke of vast numbers of **militant Atheists**,
especially where she lived in **Austin, Texas**.

She detailed this in her 2014 book “*Something other than God*”

- **Atheism** is for the *Intelligentsia*...
- **Christianity** is for those people you feel sorry for ...
and **Atheists** spent a great deal of time bashing them!

It was only after she married and held her first child in her arms that **the Atheist**
description of a person as **a cognitive complex array of atoms** just didn’t seem
right and she came to the conclusion that **the love that entered into her life** had a
source ... an **infinite, unchanging source**; there **had to be God**.

She bought and read **The Catechism** of the Catholic Church
and there she found “*a perfectly consistent moral code.*”

She called it: “*The Owner’s Manual to the Human Soul*”

So you see, God is still being rejected ... just as **He** was 2000 years ago!

And He’s looking for us ... **you and me** ... to turn this around.

Your Church is calling you to invest yourself in handing on the faith.

This is the time of the New Evangelization!

This image of the Good Shepherd is the gift I gave to the RCIA team ...
acknowledging them as being **shepherds themselves in guiding 18 people into the Catholic Church!**

And all 7 on the team re-upped to guide **the class next year!**

You too go out and speak often
of **how blessed we are** to have such a **Good Shepherd** watching over us.

Jesus, Our Lord and Our Friend, loves us infinitely and will never leave us.

By following Him, we will find **safe pastures in this life**
and find our way home to be with Jesus in **Eternal Life**.
We the Sheep with **the Holy Lamb of God!**

Just remember **the heart of God’s word** there in **Psalm 118 verse 8**

“It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man.”