



A SIX WEEK LENTEN STUDY

(Based on “Holy Habits: Gladness and Generosity”)

When we think about Lent, our minds go to giving up things as a reminder of what Jesus was willing to give up for us. Sometimes, people think of it as a penance. This study shows how we can have a generosity of spirit and joy in giving.

Each week one of the four contributors to this series shares a reflection based on the scripture reading. The *Holy Habits* is a way of life to be lived by the disciples of Jesus, both individually and collectively. They ask that we keep our hearts and minds open to the Holy Spirit and be alert to the wonders of God’s grace and the signs of God’s love that emerge as we live this down-to-earth, holy way of life that Luke (Acts 2:47), invites us to imitate.

WEEK TWO: THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Reading: Psalm 23

Reflection: Steve Aisthorpe, one of the four writers of this *Gladness and Generosity* series, describes how a few years ago, after decades of excellent health, he plunged into a period of protracted illness. It was like a roller coaster, swooping plunges into the depths were followed by painfully slow progress to regain previous levels, only to then be catapulted into the next gut-wrenching drop. Normally an optimistic person, lengthy periods of chronic fatigue and lingering pain whittled away his resilience. During the deepest troughs unable to read, there was a portion of scripture, one of the few he managed to memorise, that brought encouragement and reassurance. This 23rd psalm was a well of assurance and an oasis of cheer while journeying through a desert of discouragement and despair.

The shepherds of David’s world kept small flocks. They really did *lead* their sheep and *knew* them. A good shepherd enabled the flock to thrive by leading them to places of plentiful grazing, fresh water – and rest, without fear of predators. David knew from experience the courage and commitment needed to be a good shepherd. He had killed bears and lions while protecting his father’s sheep (1 Samuel 17:34-36). When Jesus said, “I am the gate” (John 10:9) he had in mind the habit of the best

shepherds to spend the night sleeping stretched across the entrance of the fold to ensure the safety and well-being of those under his charge in the most diligent and intimate way.

Read again today's psalm, allowing the promises of provision, security, rest, guidance and hope to permeate the deepest parts of your being – and recognising the gladness that wells up in response.

QUESTIONS:

1. Why do you think that Psalm 23 has become the best known of all the psalms?
2. Who can honestly say that they 'lack nothing'?
3. Where does the Lord lead you to refresh your soul?
4. How do you experience the guidance of the Lord?
5. In the context of the Middle East, the phrase 'You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows' speaks of generous hospitality. What might be the equivalent expression in our day and culture?
6. What situations face your community, nation or the world which might be thought of as 'the darkest valley', and how might the Lord use his 'rod and staff' (which a shepherd uses to protect the flock from danger and draw them closer when they stray)?

SUGGESTION:

For one month, whenever you consider buying something other than the essentials, rather than making the purchase, set aside a similar amount of money. At the end of the month, donate that amount to a person in need (anonymously), or a worthwhile cause. Remember to avoid the pitfalls Jesus cautioned against in Matthew 6:1-4. Write down your experiences and what you learned and how it might change your behaviour in the future.

IN THE NEXT FEW DAYS, THINK ABOUT THE FOLLOWING:

- In what aspects of life do you find it easy to be glad and generous, and in which areas is it more challenging. What support would be helpful?
- For whom could you prepare a table of generosity?

