

September 2, 2007

## Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Father Pat's Pastoral Ponderings

In addition to Matthew 9: 35-38, one other place in the New Testament speaks of Jesus' compassion in terms of the people being sheep without a shepherd. This is a passage in Mark, which reads, "And Jesus, when He came out, saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. So He began to teach them many things (6:34)."

Like the text in Matthew, this pastoral metaphor is not directly related to anything Jesus actually says; it is, rather, the evangelist's interpretation of how Jesus *feels*. Also as in Matthew, the metaphor is clearly drawn from an Old Testament theme (Numbers 27:17; 1 Kings 22:17; Ezekiel 34:5; Zechariah 10:2; Judith 11:15).

These similarities render all the more striking the major difference between the contexts of Matthew and Mark with respect to this theme. Whereas in Matthew the context is the missionary vocation of the Church, in Mark it is the multiplication of the loaves.

It is most instructive to examine the theme of the shepherd in this context. In fact, Mark's observation about Jesus' pastoral compassion here serves to introduce his first account of the multiplication of the loaves (6:35-44). That is to say, it is precisely as the Good Shepherd that Mark describes Him as feeding the people with bread in the wilderness.

Mark accomplishes this, moreover, by alluding to the imagery of the Good Shepherd Psalm in connection with the multiplication of the loaves. Thus, we observe that the event takes place at the waterside (6:45) and that He makes the people recline on the green grass (6:39), even though it was in the desert (*eremos*--6:35).

By introducing the imagery of the Good Shepherd Psalm into his first account of the multiplication of the loaves, Mark gives that image a Eucharistic dimension, because his description of the event has a pronounced Eucharistic tone. We observe, for instance, that the action of Jesus is heavily concentrated on the bread, rather than the fish. We observe also that Mark uses the four "Eucharistic verbs" to describe how Jesus "took" the loaves, "blessed," "broke," and "gave them to His disciples to set before them" (6:41; ). All of this action, in Mark, is rooted in the

compassion of Jesus, "because they were like sheep not having a shepherd."

To appreciate the significance of Mark's joining of these two themes, we may look at his account of the Last Supper, where "Jesus *took* bread, *blessed* and *broke* it, and *gave* it to them" (14:22, emphasis added). One observes here the same four verbs with which Mark describes the multiplication of the loaves.

Furthermore, immediately after the Last Supper in Mark, Jesus is once again portrayed as the Shepherd. Mark quotes Him: "All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: 'I will strike the Shepherd, And the sheep will be scattered'" (14:27, quoting Zechariah 13:7). It is clearly significant that the multiplication of the loaves and the setting of the Last Supper are the only two places where Mark uses the noun "shepherd." In each place Jesus provides bread .

In our extant literature, then, Mark's gospel is the first work that testifies to a Eucharistic understanding of the Good Shepherd Psalm.

This Eucharistic association with the Good Shepherd Psalm and Mark's account of the multiplication of the loaves was recognized fairly early in Christian history. It is clear, for example, in two features of traditional Eucharistic rite of the church at Rome

The first of these is found in the consecration of bread, which says that Jesus, "the day before He suffered, took bread into His holy and venerable hands, and having raised His eyes to heaven (*elevatis oculis in coelum*) to you, God, His Almighty Father, giving thanks to You, He blessed it, broke it, and gave it to His disciples." We observe here an entire phrase (a participial ablative absolute), "His eyes raised to heaven," which is not found in a single New Testament account of the Last Supper. It is taken entirely from Mark's narrative of the multiplication of the loaves: "And when He had taken the five loaves and the two fish, *He looked up to heaven*, blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to His disciples" (6:41, emphasis added). In Mark the expression is an active participial phrase, "having raised His eyes to heaven." It is an unmistakable link between Mark's multiplication narrative and the Roman Eucharistic rite.

The second feature comes in the consecration of the chalice, which says that Jesus, "when the supper was ended, taking also *this illustrious chalice* into His holy and venerable hands, again giving thanks to You, He blessed it, and gave it to His disciples" (emphasis added). The words translated here as "this illustrious chalice" are *hunc praeclarum calicem*, and in fact

they are an unmistakable citation from the Vetus Latina of the Good Shepherd Psalm: "my chalice which inebriates me, how illustrious it is"-- *calix meus inebrians, quam praeclarus est.*" The *praeclarus calix* of the psalm thus becomes the very cup that contours the Lord's Eucharistic blood.

The binding text that holds together these images of the Roman Eucharistic liturgy is clearly Mark's first account of the multiplying of the loaves, where Jesus appears as the compassionate Shepherd. This fact is all the more intriguing if we bear in mind that Rome, according to the earliest testimonies of the Church Fathers, was the place where Mark composed his gospel.

©2007 Patrick Henry Reardon

**All Saints Orthodox Church**  
**Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America**  
4129 W. Newport Avenue / Chicago, IL 60641  
Church Office: (773) 777-0749  
<http://www.allsaintsorthodox.org/>

**Father Patrick Henry Reardon, Pastor**  
[phri@touchstonemag.com](mailto:phri@touchstonemag.com)

**Pastor's Daily Biblical Reflections:**  
[www.touchstonemag.com/frpat.html](http://www.touchstonemag.com/frpat.html)

**Pastoral Ponderings:**  
[http://www.allsaintsorthodox.org/pastor/pastoral\\_ponderings.php](http://www.allsaintsorthodox.org/pastor/pastoral_ponderings.php)