

All Souls' Day

November 2, 2025

“Psalms 4:23: ‘The Lord is my shepherd’”

Lieutenant General Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson was one of the southern heroes of the Civil War. This mysterious officer figure fought brilliantly at Manassas, Antietam, Fredericksburg, and the famous Valley Campaign. His last battle was at a place called Chancellorsville in Virginia. In early May 1863, Confederate forces defeated a large union army. In a tragic irony, North Carolina soldiers accidentally shot and wounded Stonewall Jackson.

As he lay dying, Jackson uttered these memorable words at 3:15 on May 10: “Let us cross over the river, and rest under the shade of the tree.” The Lord was the shepherd of Stonewall Jackson’s life. He guided and inspired this Confederate who served God and country in the best way he knew how.

“The Lord is my shepherd.” Psalm 23 is “probably the best-known and most-loved Psalm. British preacher Charles Spurgeon called it “The Pearl of the Psalms.” Its 6 verses are rich in content and imagery. King David supposedly wrote it, perhaps inspired by his experiences tending his father’s sheep (1 Sam. 16:15; 2 Sam. 5:2-5).

The idea of God as shepherd dates back to Jacob, who declared on his deathbed, “*God has been my shepherd all the days of my life*” (Gen. 48:15). David himself was known as a “shepherd-king” of Israel. The prophet Isaiah compared God to a shepherd who gathers the lambs in his arms and keeps them close to his heart.

Jesus declared himself to be “*the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep*” (Jn. 10:11), and Saint Peter writes, “*You were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls*” (1 Pet. 2:14-25).

What does the good shepherd do for us? How can he help us? First, he helps by refreshing our souls. When I think of refreshment, I think of a tall glass of lemonade on a hot summer day, or these days, a warm cup of hot chocolate. Even

a glass of water refreshes our body. Life can become dry and stale, and so we need the refreshment God can give: the water of prayer, the food and drink of Eucharist, the consoling power of grace in Confession. The Lord give us what we need to stay alive and renewed on the Journey of Faith.

The Lord also “*guides us in right paths.*” The Journey of Faith can be a rocky one. It is filled with pot holes, twists and turns, and we can be tempted to go off the right path (God’s path) to the wrong path (the devil’s detour). Like a road map, Sacred Scripture keeps us on the path God intends for our souls.

Finally, in this life, the Lord “*gives us courage.*” We are all afraid at some point in our lives. Health concerns, financial worries, these days loss of food benefits, job conflicts, relationship challenges all concern us. And we can be afraid to live out faith and bear witness to Jesus. We fear unpopularity when we stand for Christ and against the world, which can include our friends who sometimes compromise their faith for an easier life. We need the courage of conviction on the Journey of Faith to stay strong and committed to Christ. ‘

Someone wrote of the need for courage “when the bonds of matrimony are breaking, to avoid dishonest business ventures, to obey the Church’s teachings on birth control, to be detached from material goods, to practice corporal mortification” (F. Fernandez, *In Conversation with God, Vol. 5*, 2015, 357).

The Lord continues to shepherd us in the next life. All Souls’ Day reminds us that God’s mercy extends beyond the grave. Purgatory is not a waiting room, a jail cell, a holding room, or a state of suspended animation. It is instead a positive purification of unconfessed venial sins, faults, and imperfections. It is called “a final cleansing of human imperfection” before heaven (CCC 1031). It is a burning, cleansing fire. The Lord, through purgatory, is shepherding us into heaven. We can avoid it only by living a saintly life on earth. That means simply reading the daily Scriptures and living them out in a perfect manner (or as perfectly as possible). This requires **prayer, worship, charity, and learning** at the feet of the Savior.

"The Lord is my shepherd." May Jesus, who shepherded a Civil War general across the river of life to the shores of eternity, remain by our side as we follow his loving guidance.

Mary, Mother of the Church, pray for us. God bless you.