

FEBRUARY 7, 2026 FATHER JOHN BERTAIO

As I was reflecting on this beautiful Gospel today, I went back to when my brother and I were children, we used to go to my uncle's dairy farm in our summer vacations.

At first it was fun getting up early in the morning, going to the barn to see all the cows waiting patiently to be milked and fed.

Afterwards, my aunt always prepared a fantastic breakfast with the best coffee in town. Maybe that's why I got to like coffee so much, like I still do today.

During the meal they, my uncle and my aunt, would talk about the cows as if they were children. Each one was identified by a name and a number. Each was highly treasured. After all, they were their livelihood.

This routine went on seven days a week, no days off, very little time to rest, and, in my thinking, did they ever take a vacation to get away and take some rest?

My appreciation for our farmers grew over that time as I spent on my uncle's farm. Today, I would consider farming a vocation that helps so many people around the world.

In today's Gospel, Jesus talks about being a good shepherd who knows his flock and cares for each one of them by name.

Yet, this is a care different from the farmer. You see, the farmer must, at one point or another, have to let go of that cow or those cows that no longer produce the milk. Makes perfect sense.

Jesus, like the good shepherd, he holds on to each one of us, even when we tend to go astray for one reason or another. He does not let go.

Each one of us is irreplaceable and plays a role in his life, in some private life, perhaps even in single state, maybe even with family.

Then we have those, like myself, with a mission to ministry, to yourself, to others, and of course anyone who has looked for the ministries, the sacrament of the church, with more responsibilities, such as also we have the bishops with great responsibility. Abbots, superiors, and those in administration of the church.

In church ministry, we all have a ministry. We all need to minister to others in one way or another.

And sometimes the crowds are like sheep, according to today's Gospel, without a shepherd, and I quote:

“On a level deeper than verbal instruction, Jesus gives direction to our, our parish lives through his holy spirit. To the extent that a community is open to the Lord, it will receive direction from him, not in a thunderclap or a flash of lightning, but through heartfelt prayer and discernment.

Jesus is the great high priest who connects us into the life of the Father and into the Father's design for creation. Through Jesus, our parishes and individual's lives participate in the great drama of salvation history.”

That's the end of my quote.

For example, several people have a difficult time attending a holy hour. This is being in the presence of the blessed sacrament for at least 60 minutes, if not more. At times, in total silence.

In our parish, we started the adoration of the blessed sacrament after the weekday masses, when we, as a community, pray the rosary together and meditate on the face of Jesus in the blessed sacrament on the altar.

The comments that I get are always, “Thank you, Father,” from those who stay and are learning to relate to Jesus and his mother in a more personal and intimate way.

Some tell me that it gives them the energy they need for the rest of their day.

Imagine sitting there, praying the rosary, and also meditating on the son of Mary, Jesus.

For us, who are in ministry to others, we must be filled with his love and energy, not only to recognize Jesus in other people, but in the lives that they lead as well, and guide them accordingly, without fear.

This is done by projecting calmness, tranquillity, non-judgemental reactions. In other words, being the face of Christ to those we meet.

In conclusion, how do we achieve all of these, but without any judgement whatsoever?

As my mom always had the perfect answer for everything, she would say, “When in doubt, turn first and to the most perfect disciple of Jesus, Mary, Most Holy.

She will teach us what to do, when to do, and how to do it.”

And so, we close with a prayer.

Lord Jesus, you guard and protect us from all evil. Help me to stand firm in your Word and to trust in your help in all circumstances.

May I always find rest and refuge in the shelter of your presence. Amen.