



These days we may all be looking for a quiet deserted place where the noise of the day is not heard, where days gone by return, and life itself is simple and uncomplicated. But in truth we know that such a time or place never really existed. Crowds of people have always hungered for a fuller life, stronger visions, and with “*fear and trembling*,” longed for justice, always waiting to be seen, heard, and found. So, it is today.

The “quiet place” sought is not found because crowds of people, hungering for good news, empty from the uncertainty of the times, the pain of division, and exhausted from the lies heard again and again, eagerly search, longing to be seen and heard. The crowds in the Gospel, like the crowds of people today, (and we are among them), seek a promise that will touch and intrigue; a vision that is true, compassionate, and welcoming; and a promise that the dividing walls of “enmity” might be finally broken down. Maybe justice could be embraced, all of life truly honored, respected, saved and cared for. Perhaps the cries, struggles, and dreams, *like those of that vast crowd in the gospel*, could finally be heard and believed—now today. Maybe, “trembling fear” could end. Maybe, shepherds could hear!

Those crowds in the gospel are like the crowds, of which we are part, these days. People of every sort, women, men, mothers, fathers, infants, children, babes in the womb, all “rich in diversity,” everyone at a different stage and circumstance of life, longing, laughing, crying, judged, living, hopeful, fearful, together and alone, the same, and different.

They are families seeking a new life and hope in a new land, who are judged, ridiculed, lied about, blamed, and threatened, making their “right to life” expendable. Children needing to be fed, cared for in a home that is loving, warm, and nurturing, needing a community, “a village,” to teach, embrace, and just welcome them as they long for a “right to life.”

Newly born infants, who have the right to safety, nourishment, education, and a loving home, and innocent children of every age suffering, this very day, because of war, hunger, thirst, abuse. Listen, can you hear them crying for *their* “right to life,” after they are born. Are they like sheep without a shepherd?

Can you see their mothers filled with fear, uncared for, blamed, judged, and pushed away.

They are the “vast crowds” searching for a voice that could speak truth, waiting for ears that would hear and listen, and a heart longing to know who they were, how they felt and the burdens they carry and endure, as they long for their “right to life.”

That vast crowd, alive today in every place, living in the complexities and inconsistencies of life, are longing for “the heart of a good shepherd, “moved with compassion.” They wait to be seen, heard, embraced, and welcomed with open arms, longing to be honored with a profound respect for life from its beginning through its end, in all its diverse dimensions, joys, and tragedies.

The “vast crowd,” judged enough, longs for a good shepherd who will live with all who struggle and help create a space where life can flourish and grow, where hearts can change and be renewed, where “fear and trembling” is met with compassion, justice, and a peaceful love.

Are we not all longing for such a good shepherd?

In the Gospel and at this table we find him “*teaching us many things*,” moving our heart and making us rich in our diversity.

Soon, our encounter at Table, with the One Good Shepherd, will become for us “*a summons to go*”

*forth as missionaries to bring the message of the Father's tenderness, forgiveness, and mercy to every man, woman, and child."* Pope Francis

Here, the Eucharist we enter and consume together,

makes us into "The Good Shepherd," who sees the vast crowd with a heart of compassion, and goes forth with a mission to break down the dividing walls, and bring "*peace to those who are far off and to those who are near.*"

