

# THE DISCRETE SHEPHERDING OF THE FATHER

Alberto Toutin ssc  
Superior General

**INFO SSCC Brothers No 185– 2 May 2024**

Dear brothers, sisters and lay people,

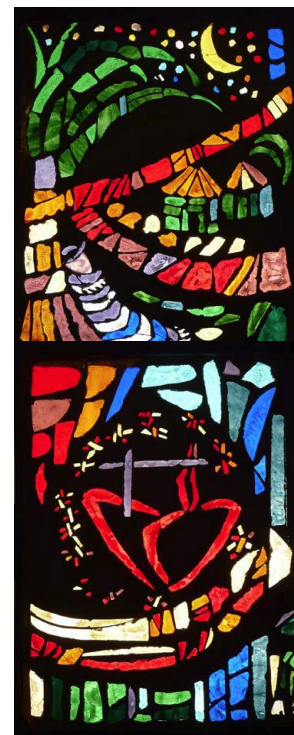
In this Easter season we have been meditating hand in hand helped with the Gospel of John: Jesus is presented to us as the bread of life, the door and the good shepherd. All of these figures point to a similar desire: to give life, to help others have life - a precious and fragile gift - and for this life to be abundant and eternal. This desire has its deepest roots in Jesus' relationship with his Father. He wants none of those who have been entrusted to Him to be lost. Those who come to Jesus are drawn to his heart. The Father knows his Son by loving him. With this insight, Jesus understands that there is no other way to know his sheep - those in his sheepfold and beyond - than by loving them, caring for them and laying down his life for them.

Basically, Jesus, who presents himself as the good shepherd, comes to understand that he himself is being shepherded discreetly and continually by his Father. To be a good shepherd, one must allow oneself to be shepherded by the Father, to be known and to be loved by him. It can be a long apprenticeship. Perhaps a whole lifetime is not enough for this to fully take flesh in us in such a way that we become the door through which many can come to recognise that they have already been drawn by the Father, known and loved by him. Still, the Father offers us many opportunities to open ourselves to this fundamental experience.

Our brother Damien discovered this little by little on Molokai. When he looked at the lepers, he had to overcome a natural repugnance. He succeeded in doing so by looking at them from the point of view of Jesus' self-giving.

He had already given himself for them. This view and understanding affected how Damien looked at them and his way of being with them:

"They are hideous to see, but they have a soul redeemed at the price of the adorable blood of our Divine Saviour. He also in his divine charity consoled the



Stained glass-windows by  
Javier Garito ssc

lepers. If I cannot heal as he did, at least I can console them and by the sacred ministry, which he in his goodness confided to me, I hope that many among them purified of the leprosy of the soul will go to present themselves before his tribunal ready to enter into the Society of the blessed." (Damien's letter to the Superior General, Sylvain Rouchouze, August 1873).

By allowing himself to be shepherded by his "dear lepers", Damien discovered that he had to take care of them not only as regards their spiritual needs but also their material needs. This is how the Father shepherds, the Father who knows and attends to the needs of his children for food, clothing and affection.

**"Damien shared not only his life, but also the ministry that the Lord had entrusted to him"**

Damien shared not only his life, but also the ministry that the Lord had entrusted to him. What is ministry if not an expression of the charity of Christ and of God the Father towards humanity, especially towards its most suffering

members? Just as life grows by giving it away, Damien discovered that the charity that comes through ministry was not his own, but was a gift that grew as he shared it with his fellow lepers, inspiring them in turn to charity. Damien went on to create two associations in Kalawao, one for men and one for women, whose main purpose was "to visit and help the sick" (Damien's letter to the Superior General, Sylvain Bousquet, 24 April 1877). He also established perpetual adoration in the two churches of Kalawao and Kalaupapa. Damien was edified as a pastor to see that the sick, even if they cannot come to the church to adore, do so from "their beds of pain in their miserable cabins" (Damien's letter to Superior General Sylvain Bousquet, 4 February 1879).

Let us allow ourselves to be shepherded by the Father, as Jesus did, as Damien did. In the daily life of our communities and in the exercise of the ministry we have received, let us allow ourselves to be known and loved by the Father. In so doing we will become for our brothers and sisters, bread shared, life given and a welcoming door: "To live in such a way that anyone can say: I fit in there" (Esteban Gumucio ssc).

Fraternally,

**Alberto Toutin ssc**  
***Superior General***