

TAPE: Alleluia (Stravinsky)

EASTER PREFACE

After almost a week of crisis and anxiety when three men were the focus of the world's attention, and of its prayers, I wonder what's been learnt, about man, about prayer, about God? Yesterday was declared a day of thanksgiving and prayer in the United States for the safe return of the three astronauts. But, after all the anxious prayer of the previous days, how many people, after the event, spent even half as long yesterday in a prayer of thanksgiving to God that their previous prayer was answered, thanksgiving for the skill and courage and ingenuity of men, whole tears of men and women, who prevented a spectacular tragedy? — and I don't mean only in America. How many returned to give praise and thanks to God? In an incident in our Lord's life when he healed 10 lepers, there was only one who remembered. What about you? Today there are other headlines, and the news summary ~~has~~ ^{has} ~~nothing~~ ^{little} to say about astronauts. A few days ago we were told all the world was praying ... ~~has~~ ^{has} there been no time for saying thanks? How many of us have really felt more humble in the face of what happened last week — or its public expression of prayer and thanksgiving, our radio and television for instance, really so embarrassing? The pace of modern life, and the incessant demands of news and instant comment give little time and no encouragement for us to reflect on what we've seen and heard and learnt, to understand man a little better in all his glory and limitations, to appreciate God's place in the world and man's life or the place of ^{our} world and life in God's. In a world where people don't or are not allowed to say "thank you"

to God in recognition and respect, it's hardly surprising if they don't say it to each other and give each other little recognition or respect. Perhaps that's just another symptom of how un-human a lot of modern life has become. Is it part of the natural, widespread interest and anxiety the world showed that week for three men that sophisticated modern man was shocked because his science & technology failed? that man's faith in himself alone was shaken? The tragic death in the French alps, at the same time, of nearly 200 young patients in a sanatorium, made much less impact on people — we're accustomed to those kind of accidents! Our modern news media bring them to our notice so often — and pass on to something else. We have to find our own time to reflect and pray, if we're to be human rather than registering facts & events, computer-like, as they're fed to us by newspaper and so on. With all the talk today of freedom, individual development, personal responsibility, it's surprising how sheep-like most people really are ... which mightn't matter too much if one could have confidence in the shepherds they follow, but ... How often do we give ourselves, let alone other people, a chance to hear the voice of the shepherd and leader of mankind, Christ our Lord? Yesterday in the Church's liturgy was Good Shepherd Sunday, so-called because of the very long-standing custom of reading the 10th ch. of St John's gospel in the weeks after Easter, a custom that has been refurbished now in using different extracts from that chapter each year on the 4th Sunday of paschaltide. But before saying anything more about that, let's begin with a prayer of thanksgiving to this modern French hymn of thanksgiving,

Deits
RHK ERA-D-53
2/82

Eucharistic Acclamation, by Fr Lucien Deits

MUSIC - PRAYERS

For a

number of years now. Good Shepherd Sunday has been observed as a day of special prayer for vocations to the priesthood and religious life. In a way, I think this has been a pity because it's tended to impoverish in ordinary people's minds the rich connotations which the imagery of the scripture and our Lord's use and application of it to Himself has. The Good Shepherd was one of the earliest and most widespread images used in Christian art - in paintings in the catacombs, in sculpture, mosaic and so on. Of course in modern society there aren't many shepherds - how many people in HK have ever seen a sheep? - so a lot of the symbolism that was obvious to our Lord's hearers is lost on us. But this is all the more reason for trying to follow, in study of the scriptures and in prayer, the full significance of what our Lord meant by calling Himself the good, true, model shepherd, who knows the sheep that are His and whose sheep know Him, recognise and listen for His voice, and follow Him wherever He goes. Really, the whole imagery (and perhaps especially the particular extract from the chapter of St John wh. you will have heard at Mass yesterday) is a description of Christ as saviour and Lord of the world - which is why it's read in Easter time. He laid down His life for us and took it up again, freely, to ~~keep~~^{make us} keep us as one flock together, united with Him as He is with His Father, so that where He goes, we can go too... God loves and cares for mankind so much - but not everyone will listen to His voice - or say a prayer of thanks to Him.