

Haec Dies (Shepherd)  
(RS 58)

"This day was made by the Lord: we rejoice & are glad: Alleluia"

I'm afraid I just couldn't resist the idea of opening Nidday Prayers today with that version of the Easter antiphon, Haec Dies — it's a setting by John Shephard: and my theme today is Christ the Good Shepherd, from the gospel read at Mass yesterday. Unfortunately the imagery of the Bible and its times and location <sup>is</sup> quite different from what we've used to in our modern cultures. For one thing, though you may know what a shepherd is today in some of the <sup>the</sup> <sup>the</sup> places where they still survive, this can in fact be more of a hindrance than a help in understanding what Christ was talking about when He called Himself the Good Shepherd. For Him, and His listeners, there was a whole cultural, and political background to give a depth of meaning to what He said — and we got to try to grasp the meaning, the message in our own terms and words, without being side-tracked by the way in which the meaning and message were first expressed. If He were speaking in Hong Kong today, Christ certainly wouldn't have said anything about shepherds and sheep. How would He have spoken? Perhaps we could recall our Mass as we recite our prayers at Nidday today.

### PRAYERS

Solomon Ps 22. Of all the 150 Psalms, Ps 22 (23 in the Hebrew numbering) is perhaps the best known and best loved — it's the one about the Lord being our shepherd.

That is a psalm of confidence and trust — God is our protector, our friend, who cares for us and looks after our wants and needs. It is poetry of course — we're not sheep, or shouldn't be. But God does care for us as if we were the only thing that mattered, which we are to Him. And it's not a kind of impersonal care — it's intimate, very close: He's our best, who writes to share with us everything he has. He wants us to be one of his family. When Christ called Himself the Good Shepherd, He was echoing this Ps., and pointing out who he really was. He would give His life for those He loves — and giving His life, He would become Lord and Master of all through His rising from death. He would be the source of life, new life, for all his people. Risen now, He would be the magnet, the leader, to draw all mankind into the loving care of the family of God. Through death and resurrection He would gather together into one community all those who were lost, straying, looking for a way out, a meaning for existence: all those who were distraught, confused, upset, not knowing what they should do or where they should go. He, Christ, is the one who gives hope, life, meaning — He is Truth, He is the Way. When He said He was the Good Shepherd He would gather all his sheep into one fold. He was also echoing the description in the Old Testament book of Ezekiel of the great Messiah, redeemer whom God would send His people. So, he was really talking about



his whole life-purpose and his mission, and the centre of it all, his redemption of mankind by dying, rising and returning to his Father. So this is very much an Easter Gospel, at the time when we're celebrating all He's done for us. Not by any means everybody for whom He gave His life & to whom He wants to give life, has already been gathered into His family. That's something ~~we~~ <sup>we</sup> who have come to know Him, have got to help do. Christ ~~spoke~~ <sup>told</sup> a parable of a shepherd going to look for one out of his flock who got lost — the figures today are somewhat the other way round: we mustn't spend all our care and attention on the one who already belong to Christ, but go out looking for the other 99 — no-one for whom Christ died can be outside our care. Now that he's no longer among us in his flock, he hasn't left us without care. He's appointed others, starting with His Apostles, to shepherd His flock, be their leaders, and serve the community He formed. The Church today still needs leaders, of all kinds; but let's not forget it also needs leaders who can feed His flock — priests to give life, pass on Christ's risen life. That's why yesterday was also a day of prayer for vocations — let's pray for those, good men, good leaders