



THE SHEPHERD'S VOICE

*Daily Devotion at Zion + January 17, 2021 AD + **Epiphany Season***

This Week: Devotion and Mental Health

Who cares for a thing better than He who made it?

Our Lord has spoken frequently of the mind (“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind,” Matt. 22:37)—as did the early Church (“Be transformed by the renewal of your mind,” Romans 12:2). Christ knows the anguish of the mind (“And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly,” Luke 22:44; “He groaned in the spirit, and was troubled,” John 11:33), as does His Church (“My conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great grief and continual sorrow in my heart,” St. Paul in Romans 9:2). The Church has a Lord who not only cares for the mind, but who also sympathizes with its weaknesses. Yet by sharing in these sufferings, and by His grace, Christ has worked through the Church to curate a 2,000-year-and-counting history of caring for the mind, drawn from His own wisdom and mercy.

How does home and personal devotion contribute to that living heritage of care?

This issue of “Shepherd’s Voice” explores that subject. Care of the mind can have many dimensions, and they all come from God’s gracious hand. Daily use of God’s Word and prayer plays one important role, putting us in touch with the Great Physician who heals our wounds by His own.

About the Cover Art

Chris Powers, who painted the cover art, hosts an online source of free art, “Full of Eyes” (www.fullofeyes.com). A conservative Baptist, he views art as his contribution to God’s mission of the Gospel. In this painting, he casts a visual rendering of 2 Corinthians 12:9: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” It depicts a troubled man, beset by thorns without and (given his anguished face) fears within. Nevertheless, he bears the grace of God, and through him the light of Christ shines. So it goes for all who belong to the Crucified: in our weakness, God makes His power perfect.

Introducing *Seelsorge*, or Soul-Care

God calls us each day to care for those around us as well as for ourselves. Some aspects of that care are physical: feeding families, supporting neighbors in their business, seeing doctors or dentists, and similar good tasks. The Church participates in all those fields of care, but there is one kind of care peculiar to its ministry, complete with its own language. *Seelsorge* (zeel-sorg-eh), literally “soul-care,” is the art of caring for the human spirit. God extends this care on earth through His Gospel. It’s more than “making people feel better.” It’s a matter of securing the conscience with God’s favor. Knowing ourselves to be *at ease* with God, we are strengthened for living freely among our neighbors in His creation. This, ultimately, is the finest health possible, because it keeps us in peace even when all other health fails and circumstances afflict us. It’s medicine is Word and sacrament, the kindness of God applied through preaching, teaching, Baptism, absolution, Supper, liturgy, and devotion.

Daily Readings for the Week of January 24 (Epiphany 3)

S	Isaiah 47:1-15 Hebrews 10:19-31 John 5:2-18	Galatians 3:1-14 Mark 6:30-46
M	Isaiah 48:1-11 Galatians 1:1-17 Mark 5:21-43	F Isaiah 50:1-11 Galatians 3:15-22 Mark 6:47-56
T	Isaiah 48:12-22 Galatians 1:18-2:10 Mark 6:1-13	Sa Isaiah 51:1-8 Galatians 3:23-29 Mark 7:1-23
W	Isaiah 49:1-12 Galatians 2:11-21 Mark 6:13-29	
Th	Isaiah 49:13-26	

These readings correspond to pages 281-316 in Volume I of For All the Saints. To acquire For All the Saints or other devotionals, please contact the church office.

RESILIENCY One of Devotion's Greatest Gifts

Is it possible to laugh at failure, keep hope in sorrow, brook danger, and seek the good of others in the midst of our own pain? As situations change, and we find ourselves isolated or free, healthy or sick, may we still have resiliency of mind and soul?

We can. As St. Paul writes in his letter to the Philippians:

I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation . . . I can do all this through Him who gives me strength (Phil. 4:12-13)

Our Lord Jesus is not merely another person, unseen but present, like a friendly ghost. He actively *communes* with the believer. That is, He opens His mind to our mind, His Spirit to our soul—He even gives us His own body and blood. Christian devotion draws on this active self-giving of our Lord, and it is key to being resilient in changing circumstances.

How does it work? The gifts of devotion (the Word of God and prayer) *form our minds* in the *mind of Christ*. His mind knows the pain of crucifixion, which gathers up every cross we may bear in this world, and it also knows the freedom and health of resurrection. When our mind is shaped by that once-buried, now-risen mind, it authors the defining narrative and perspective of our life, too, and helps us meet life's peaks and valleys.

In sorrow, we are united with Him who turned sorrow to dancing. In happiness, we are one with Him who lost all earthly joys only to gain greater ones. His experience, freely shared with us, both *emboldens* us, freeing us even for humor in sorrow, and it *tempers* us, teaching us humility in the face of blessing.

Devotion is therefore one of the most valuable resources we have for mental health. It frees us to join St. Paul in “being content in any and every situation.”