

Misericordias Domini
18 April, Anno Domini 2021
St. John 10:11-16
Pastor Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father and of the +Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Alleluia! He is risen!

The texts for today hold before us a very important distinction between the true Shepherd, the true Bishop of your soul, and all the false ones. As Jesus said, the true Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. He dies so that they may live. He runs out to meet the pack of wolves and allows the wolves to have their fill of Him so that the sheep might escape unharmed. The Good Shepherd cares for nothing more than His sheep. Their life, their well-being, their protection is His highest and only concern.

To the world, this is madness. No person's life is worth that. It's not worth dying for sheep who love to wander back into danger, back into death's dark vale, away from the safety of the flock. Just let them die and save yourself. Why should the shepherd suffer want, misfortune, hatred, and persecution from the world or even from the sheep? Why should he put himself at risk? The sheep should be able to feed themselves. They can figure out for themselves what they need and what they should stay away from. As long as they're happy and no one is complaining, the flock is fine.

But that's the difference between God and men. Men care only for themselves. They love their own comfort and fully bellies more than they love one another. The false shepherds care absolutely nothing for the sheep. So long as the false teacher has a full belly, the well-being of the sheep is irrelevant. If some of the flock wanders off? No worry. Others will take their place. What of the wolves of temptation, persecution, affliction, and false teaching, constantly lurking around, looking for the weak and the vulnerable? The false teacher can't be bothered by weak and struggling sheep. Those sheep will drag him and perhaps even others of the flock down. It's probably better if the flock gets thinned. Those weak sheep just suck time and energy and resources and joy from everyone else, especially the shepherd. They're a real drain on the Church. Oh, for a while they might be worth a few bucks or photo ops. But what we really want are the strong, sleek, healthy sheep who can fill the offering plates and give the church a good face.

And what will false teachers say to benefit themselves at the expense of the flock? Anything. Because, again, the sheep don't matter. The salvation of the sheep is irrelevant. Feeding the sheep with Christ and His Word doesn't gain a whole lot of attention. Flash and gimmicks are the name of the game. Feed the sheep with philosophy, moralism, and psychology. In fact, the very best way for false teachers to enrich themselves is to keep your salvation in question, to withhold the certainty of the Good Shepherd's atoning death and the joyous freedom of His empty tomb. Nothing serves a false teacher better than teaching justification as a subjective process you complete rather than the objective, completed fact that it is. If people can't be sure of their salvation and the forgiveness of their sins, then they will be waiting for someone to tell them what they must do, they will chase after whoever promises to have discovered the next best thing.

And for the false teacher, there is no such thing as false teaching. If it sounds good, if it fills seats, if it makes you feel good about you, they'll say it. They'll invite the wolves into the pen and let them feast. The wolves just have a different perspective and approach. They'll change the Word of God so that the world doesn't take offense. They'll follow the sheep rather than lead them to the quiet waters and green pastures of Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper that have been given and prepared by the holy suffering and death of the Good Shepherd.

The Good Shepherd, because He loves you, doesn't feed you on cheap, empty, feel-good junk food because He knows it will kill you. He won't withhold from you anything that is necessary for your salvation. And everything He gives has the purpose of bringing your heart and conscience to find peace and rest in His righteousness, in His sacrificial death and resurrection for you. Nothing brings Him greater glory and pleasure than for you to know with absolute certainty that Baptism now saves you, that in that blessed flood every last ounce of guilt that once covered you in shame and despair has been washed away and the pure white robe of God's spotless Lamb has been laid upon you. You are righteous because the Shepherd has made you righteous.

Beware. False shepherds are everywhere. Satan has placed his henchmen right out in the open. The world gives them wide berth because they preach the way of the world while trying to put a Christian veneer on it. The antiChrist isn't found in some dark hole. He is found seated in God's temple, leading astray, if possible, even the elect. And their voices are alluring. They appeal to our desire to justify ourselves. They encourage you to search for

certainty in how nice or how tolerant you are. They speak reasonable things and use lots of Christian words but they gut them of their God-given meaning.

The only place these shepherds will lead you is either into an endless abyss of despair and hopelessness or the damning mountain top of arrogant self-righteousness. They will cast your conscience into the flames of judgment. They won't point out your sin because they know you enjoy it. They will assure you that what you believe is irrelevant so long as you have good intentions. And they will encourage you to find peace any and everywhere but the death and resurrection of Jesus. They care nothing for you. Do not listen to them and don't encourage anyone else to either. Shut them out and shut them up.

There is only one Shepherd who has laid down His life for you. Only one who loves you enough to tell you the truth. He knows those who are His own and He calls them by name. He knows you. He has gathered you into His flock and given you His own Name - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is His voice you know. It is the voice that in loving honesty declares your sin to you in order to save you from it and keep it from harming you. It is the voice that points out and condemns the false teachers so that you will not fall prey to them. It is the voice that unhesitatingly forgives penitent sinners. It is the voice that says "Peace" in the midst of your most frightening and desperate hour. It is the voice that invites you to call His Father, your Father.

There is no one else who speaks these things. There is no one else who stands in the breach between you and the wrath of God. There is no one else who has broken the iron chains of death. There is only one Good Shepherd whose only concern is the life of His flock - Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God. Let His voice fill your hearts and your homes. Let His Word fill your ears and your mouths. Jesus, and He alone, is the one who has found you in the midst of your wandering and your sin and brought you back to His flock because He cares for you.

Alleluia! He is risen!

In the Name of +Jesus.