

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Our Lord healed the man born blind. The Pharisees, desiring to discredit the miracle, and the One who performed it, hold an investigation, but it proves fruitless. The Lord rebukes them: “For judgment I have come into this world, in order that the ones not seeing see, and the seeing become blind.” The Pharisees object, saying “We’re not blind”. Our Lord condemns them with strong Words: “If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, “We are seeing”, your sin remains.”

In further condemnation of the Pharisees, the Lord speaks the Parable of the Sheepfold. “The one not entering through the door of the gate into the sheepfold but going in another way is a thief and a robber... But the One entering through the door is the Shepherd of the sheep.” It is in this context that the Lord speaks the Words you heard read this morning: “I AM the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.”

By His Self-revelation, by His open teaching of Who He Is, the Lord speaks Words that bring great comfort to His Church, His Flock. He is the Good Shepherd. His voice soothes the flock. You, the Holy Church, His Blood-bought Flock, hearken to His Word because He is your Shepherd. You trust Him. You follow Him because in a dangerous and threatening world He leads you to safety.

In a world filled with the harmful fodder of spiritual junk food, He leads you to green pasture. In a world that would poison you, drown you, pollute you, carry you away in the swift waters of fads and trends, He leads you to still waters. In a world that troubles, tempts, confuses and oppresses, He restores your soul. His Word calms and strengthens you. His strong arm protects you. In Him, you are safe. In Him, your soul is safe. In Him, that safety is eternal.

There are those, of course, that will not follow Him. The prideful individualism of this fallen, sin filled world has made men blind. They claim they can see. They believe they can see well enough to lead themselves. They reject that they need a shepherd, thinking that they are wise enough, strong enough, to earn their own salvation.

Or they choose another shepherd, one who does not enter through the gate, one who tells them the very things their fallen flesh itches to hear. So in pride they blindly welcome the wolf into their flock. They are the seeing blind that the Lord condemns. They remain in their sin.

The truth is that the Shepherd is smarter than the sheep. Fallen men rail against that truth. But the Shepherd knows things that the sheep do not, and He can do things that the sheep cannot do. The Good Shepherd uses His Voice and His Staff. His Voice is the Gospel, the call to follow Him. His Staff is the Law. It can guide, and it can smite. It hurts.

But it steers the sheep away from danger. Even if it causes a bit of pain, and if we apply the Law to ourselves honestly, it never feels good, that Staff causes us to turn away from the things that hurt us, no matter how badly our flesh craves them, and that blessed Staff turns us back towards the safe path upon which the Good Shepherd leads us.

So while He speaks His Words openly for the world to hear, it is to you, O Redeemed of Christ, to you, Beloved of the Lord, that the God Man Jesus Christ promises “I AM the Good Shepherd.” They are Words of comfort and consolation, Words that create and evoke trust. That trust is faith. And believing in Him, you are His Flock. You know Him, and are known by Him. And for you He lay down His life. That, His willingness to die for your salvation, is the mark of the Good Shepherd.

It is the Prophet Ezekiel that describes what the Good Shepherd does: He searches for His scattered sheep and seeks them out. For while you were yet sinners, Christ died for you. The Prophet calls the day of scattering “a dark and cloudy day”. It is the darkness of sin, the blinding darkness that caused you to stray. It is the darkness of Golgotha, when the Shepherd was stricken and the sheep scattered. But the Good Shepherd seeks those who are lost, He brings back those who were driven away, He binds up the broken and strengthens the sick. In a word, dear Christian, He saves you.

Six hundred years before the Birth of the Christ Child, Ezekiel described the work of the Good Shepherd. And some thirty years after His glorious resurrection and ascension, the Chief of the Apostles tells us how the Good Shepherd brings you back: when He was reviled, He did not revile in return. When He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously. He Himself bore your sins in His own Body on the tree, that by His precious suffering and death, having died to sins, you might live for righteousness.

It is you who were like sheep going astray, and you who have returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls. For it is of you that the Lord prophesies when He says “Other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be One Flock and One Shepherd.”

It is you who hear His voice, for faith comes by hearing. It is you, who, by the still waters of the font, are made One Flock. And it is by the blessed unity that the Holy Spirit brings that you are called, gathered, enlightened and sanctified as the One Flock of the crucified and risen Good Shepherd, the One who defeated death and rose again on the third day. You are safe from the attacks of the wolf, dear Christian, for you dwell securely in the sheepfold of the Holy Church.

Here, in the paths of righteousness, in the Sheepfold of the Good Shepherd, though you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, you fear no evil, for Christ is with you, His Rod and His Staff they comfort you. Even when you lie down, you do so with the sure promise of the resurrection, for the One who makes you lie down is the One who rose for you.

He who gathers and heal His Holy Flock, feeds His Flock. He prepares a table before you, even this day, His Table, on which He places His Body and Blood for you to eat and drink, the Rich Pasture of the Holy Church. He causes His Cup of Salvation to run over, streaming His Blood across your lips. He pastures you on Himself. Surely goodness and mercy will follow you all the days of your life. And you will dwell in the House of the Lord forever.

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