

The Good Shepherd, Part 2

April 22, 2018

In the 10th Chapter of St. John we have a mixed metaphor. At the beginning of the chapter, Our Lord is the gate to the sheepfold, and later He adds that the shepherd enters through the gate. In the passage from last Sunday, He says that He is “the good shepherd”. Of course both images are just, and Our Lord teaches us something from each one. If we see the sheepfold as representing the hidden things of God, then it is the means of acquiring that knowledge and so, through this, we enter the Sheepfold; He is the gate. From Christ’s lips come the words that lead us to God and reveal God to us. “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life” and “He who sees me sees the Father.”

Our Lord is also the one leading us to green pasture and still water so we can be nourished. He did this in an extraordinary way at the Last Supper, where He gives us His Body as food for our souls. That is the food that nourishes us for everlasting life. Our Lord, being the gate to the Sheepfold and the Shepherd, shows that, in the Incarnation, Christ is both God and man and that the “Word,” who is God, reveals Himself to us and takes care of us. So if we want to go to heaven, we need to enter through Christ—through Baptism and being nourished by Him, and also to follow Him in His Church where He has set up St. Peter and His successors as our Shepherd. Our Lord is the only Gate. He set up St. Peter to “feed my sheep”, to “feed my lambs”.

Our Lord also goes beyond the regular image of a shepherd. He is the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for His sheep. A regular shepherd will have to suffer inconveniences and even dangers, but he would not be expected to die for his sheep. No number of ovine lives can be worth a human life. That Our Lord set a different standard of laying down His life, which He took up again, and so the shepherds of souls to follow are also to lay down their lives for the faithful, as did St. Peter and all the early holy Popes. From this image we see that Our Lord demands charity and courage of His Pastors — that they defend the truth and, if necessary, lay down their lives for it. We don’t know what sort of persecution lies ahead, but we need that courage to hold fast to the Truth in the face of relentless opposition from without and within. Let us remain close to Our Lord and ask for the grace to follow Him faithfully.

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