

O Lord Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd of the sheep, who came to seek the lost and to gather them into Your fold: Have compassion on those who have wandered from You; feed those who hunger, cause the weary to lie down in Your pastures, bind up those who are broken in heart, and strengthen those who are weak; and lead us all, O Lord, in the paths of righteousness, for Your name's sake. Amen. (Parish Prayers, ed. Frank Colquhoun, p. 87)

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love You." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" and he said to Him, "Lord, You know everything; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep. Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go." (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this He said to him, "Follow me." Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, the one who also had leaned back against Him during the supper and had said, "Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?" When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about this man?" Jesus said to him, "If it is My will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!" So the saying spread abroad among the brothers that this disciple was not to die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die, but, "If it is My will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?" This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true. Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

In Christ Jesus, whose Shepherd's voice tenderly and powerfully bespeaks life and salvation to us, dear fellow redeemed:

Recently I was standing by the greeting cards for Mother's Day to begin the process of picking out a card to send my Mom. All of a sudden a woman around my age passed behind me and said: "*Oh, gol', it's already another Mother's Day again?*" Now that was open for interpretation. Was her comment reflecting her opinion of her own mother? - or a comment reflecting her opinion of her children or that she was never blessed with any children?

Well, removing all such questions from my mind, I went about choosing a card. Do we not normally look for cards that capture the

loving qualities of our mothers, which have been shown to us by their selfless deeds performed from infancy?

Today is Good Shepherd Day when we review His deeds for us sheep. While reviewing those deeds in word certainly stirs up love in the sheep for the Shepherd, but something far greater takes place than just sentimental nostalgia. **The Word of the Good Shepherd's Deeds Feeds His Sheep.**

I

The Apostle John concludes our text, in fact his entire Gospel, by observing that Jesus had done many other things, which could speak God's saving truth to us. But the world could not contain all the books it would take to express the eternal significance of the deeds this Good Shepherd has done and promises to do for us. But what had been written by inspiration was sufficient, or as John put it in the previous chapter: "these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His Name."

The beginning of our text is the reinstatement of Simon Peter into his key position as one of the Lord's Apostles. Peter, after his boasting about never forsaking Jesus, fell by denying our Lord three times. So Jesus now asks him three times if he loved him, with a self-sacrificing love even for enemies. Peter showed proper repentant humility in his answers using a different word in the Greek for love, so as not to presume too much about himself as he had done leading up to his denial. Peter's word is more that one would die for a friend.

The third time, when Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him, He used the word of a friend directed love. It grieved Peter that Jesus would even question that much love toward his Savior, but no doubt understood that it was only proper to question even this from the once proud boastful Apostle. Jesus is the only One who perfectly shows such love willingly suffering and dying even for His enemies. Peter was being reinstated based on Jesus' self-sacrificing love, which forgave him completely. Love is not just a feeling, but an action.

The Lord of the Church now entrusted Peter once again with the loving task of feeding and tending His sheep. Not only was Peter called as an Apostle for the church but he even functioned in a lead role, and not just by the force of his impetuous personality. You might remember that when Jesus warned Peter about his impending fall into denial, He instructed him by saying: "when you have turned again, i.e., have been converted, strengthen your brothers."

Peter would grow in his understanding of the position into which he had graciously been called. In his first letter he writes to his

fellow shepherds or pastors, these informative words: “I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ ... : shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears you will receive the unfading crown of glory. ... Clothe yourselves, ... with humility toward one another, for God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

When Peter first witnessed the sufferings of Christ, he was appalled and was filled with great fear. But now the words of these deeds of Jesus’ suffering had great significance for him. It would be these very words that he would now use to feed the sheep of the Good Shepherd. Peter, like Paul, and all in the office as undershepherds of the Chief Shepherd would preach Christ and Him crucified. These deeds as the Substitute for all sinners of all time redeem us all. As this word is declared sheep are gathered and they are nourished.

II

Jesus now tested his newly reinstated Apostle by informing him that he would eventually die by crucifixion. But this would not be a redemptive act for himself or for others. It would simply be a result of following Jesus, the Crucified One. Peter, as always, just as we do, struggled with his sin, saw the Apostle John and wanted to know if John would suffer the same ignoble death. We sinners like to figure out fairness and complain bitterly if we are victims of perceived injustices. Jesus reprimanded Peter for thinking such thoughts. Peter needed simply to tend to his own business, fulfilling the tasks of his God-given vocation. The Lord of the Church will direct all things for the benefit of His Church at large.

Many in this shepherding office down through the history of the Church have replaced preaching the saving deeds of the Good Shepherd with words extoling good behavior, even setting themselves up as the model for the sheep. This leaves the sheep malnourished. Consider how the Lords Supper has been distorted and even despised among many becoming merely a fellowship meal reducing its benefit to a social gathering. But we learn from Paul that every time we gather at the altar and receive the very body given and the very blood shed for the forgiveness of our sins, we proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes. In a very tangible way the Good Shepherd feeds us spiritually by placing right into our mouths this precious fruit produced by His volunteer deeds of love for us.

We as sheep do not know how to feed ourselves. If left to ourselves we would go astray and forsake the green pastures at which our Good Shepherd makes us to lie down. Through His faithful undershepherds He calls us back and feeds us with the only food that will give us life everlasting.

Rejoice that your Good Shepherd has been faithfully feeding you on the words, which alone give life, the words of His great deeds of love accomplished for you – on the cross and in the grave. He is the One who laid down His life and then took it back up again for you. Listen to His tender voice declaring you forgiven and righteous by His deeds done for you.

Flee from those voices that would have you look at your own deeds or even theirs for salvation and security. You, like Peter and all Christians, will struggle with your sin until the day you die. Your deeds are as unable to save you as are the deeds of all sinners. But the Good, holy and perfect Shepherd, whom God has sent to be His Lamb of sacrifice, lovingly accomplished the work, which alone saves. The precious words declaring His saving deeds for all mankind have the power to forgive and to give life. Listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd and follow with everlasting peace and comfort the word that forgives and bespeaks you righteous. Speaking of your works condemn. Hearing of Christ's works done in your behalf saves. Follow that voice and you will most certainly dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Amen.