

The Festival of St. Timothy of Ephesus, Bishop and Confessor
St. John 21:15-17
January 24th, 2020
Sts. Peter & Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

Do You Love Me?

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today we celebrate the festival of St. Timothy. He was the first bishop of Ephesus, according to the Church historian Eusebius, and a couple others of whom you have probably never heard. This is why he is called St. Timothy of Ephesus, because he was the first bishop, that is, pastor, of Ephesus. He is also referred to as “Confessor.” Confessor is given to those men who confessed the Christian faith boldly and faithfully, but were not martyred for their connection. He is referred to as Confessor instead of “Martyr” because the only reference to him being martyred is recorded in the apocryphal “Acts of St. Timothy” where he supposedly stopped a procession honoring the goddess Diana by preaching the Gospel, and the supporters of the false goddess of Diana dragged him through the streets, and stoned him to death. However, there is no historical evidence to support that this actually happened, which is why in the Lutheran tradition, St. Timothy of Ephesus is honored as a bishop and a confessor.

On this festival of a bishop—a pastor and shepherd of the flock of the Lord God—we hear of our Lord’s admonition to the blessed St. Peter to feed and shepherd His flock. That is what bishop and pastors, and deacons, are to do. They are to feed and shepherd the flock of the Lord God. Our Lord + Jesus calls them “My” lambs and sheep. The people of God, the Christian saints, belong to the Lord + Jesus. He bought them with His own precious, innocent Blood. He shed His Blood for them. He died for them. He died for us, so that we might have forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation.

The shepherds of the Lord + Jesus are to feed and shepherd the flock entrusted to them. The food that they give the flock is the food of the Gospel. This message just told, that our Lord + Jesus suffered and died for them, after fulfilling the Law perfectly for them. We are fed with the promises that the Lord + Jesus makes for us. These promises are the gifts He won for us by His innocent sacrifice for us on the tree of the holy cross. After fulfilling God’s Law and will perfectly, He suffered and died in our place; taking upon Himself our punishment, so that we might have our sins forgiven, and that we might be redeemed from the power of the devil, the world and our own sinful flesh. He will also take us to our eternal home in Heaven, and give us a crown of eternal life. All this He did for us. All these promises feed our souls and gives us comfort.

The shepherds of the Lord + Jesus are to also shepherd the flock of the Lord God. To shepherd means to lead. Lead them to quiet waters and good pasture. Lead them by example of a virtuous life.

Lead them by showing how a poor, miserable sinner like them can find comfort and hope in the Word of God, even when the world is seeming to crash down all around them. We know from having lived lives in this world that things rarely go according to plan. Our lives are often fraught with some consequence of living in a sin-filled world. Whether that be physical ailment, job stress, marital complications, and the like. The shepherd of the Lord + Jesus leads the flock entrusted to his care to cool waters and fresh pasture, in other words, he leads them to the Word of God and the Blessed Sacraments, because it is in these things that our Lord + Jesus has given to his shepherds that we find true peace and comfort in this life.

The Lord + Jesus in our Gospel reading from the last chapter of the Evangelist and Apostle St. John, admonishes St. Peter to do these things; to feed and shepherd His lambs and sheep. St. Peter is the perfect example of a pastor. He is filled with flaws, and yet the Lord + Jesus still chooses him to be an apostle. One may ask, "How is St. Peter filled with flaws? He was a bold proclaimer of the Gospel of the Lord + Jesus Christ, and often stood at the head of the Apostles, and lead their way." It is not difficult to see in our Lord + Jesus questioning St. Peter three times with the same question the corollary to the night of our Lord's trial when he denied Him three times.

On that night, when they were gathered in the upper room for our Lord's Last Supper before His death on the cross, St. Peter boldly confessed that He would gladly and willingly follow the Lord + Jesus anywhere even into prison and death. He even made the confession that even if the rest of them were "made to stumble" he would not. Obviously, we know what happened. Instead of following our Lord + Jesus to prison and death on the cross, St. Peter denied our Lord three times.

He learned that it is easier to say something than do it. It is easy for us to make bold assertions about our obedience to the Lord God; about what we are going to do for the Lord + Jesus. Then we are smacked in the face with the reality of what that entails. We have all boldly left another church or church body because of its heterodoxy or blatant false teachings. We may have been tempted, like St. Peter, with visions of grandeur—how glorious it was going to be now that we have freed ourselves from the shackles of being in an heterodox church body. Well now, here we are. And it is easy to look around the room and see that we are small and wonder to ourselves if it was all worth it. Top that with the continuous ridicule we receive from those in our former associations, and even from our own families, and we may be led to believe that perhaps it would have been better to stay where we were.

It is easy to hear the voices that say, "You are too small." "You do not matter." "Nobody will want to go to your church." But, this none other than the voice of the devil. It is almost ridiculous how obvious it is. He is like the schoolyard bully who is taunting you with insults to get you to despair. Ignore him. His taunts are harmless. Satan desired to sift St. Peter like wheat. Indeed, he denied the Lord + Jesus three times. Satan desires to sift us all like wheat; to drive us away from the good pasture and cool waters; to drive us away from faithful ministers of the Word of God. Do not listen to him, but listen instead to the Word of God; be drawn by the Gospel to the refreshing pastures of God's Word and the cool waters of the Blessed Sacraments. For, we have an intermediary Who knows our every care, and desires our salvation.

The Lord + Jesus prayed on behalf of St. Peter that he would not fall away. He prays on our behalf as well. He intercedes for us to His heavenly Father. Satan puts many road blocks in our way, and wants us to despair because of them. Whether those road blocks be physical ailments, job stress, or marital complications, or even, mockery and ridicule from those outside our fellowship. These are all just tools of the devil to lead us into despair. St. Peter was led into grief after his denial, and he went out and wept bitterly, but he did not despair, for he still clung to the promises of our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ.

In this pericope from the Evangelist and Apostle St. John our Lord + Jesus restores St. Peter to

the position he was in before his denial. We see a change in St. Peter. He was ever so confident before the Lord's death that he would suffer and die with the Lord + Jesus. He did not truly know what that meant until it happened. Now that he has suffered through that, he is more equipped to feed and shepherd the lambs and sheep of the Lord + Jesus. When our Lord asks him if he love Him, gone is all the bravado, and we see in St. Peter's responses only humility.

It is a shame that our English language cannot be translated in such a way that shows the true character of this conversation. For, it looks in our language like our Lord + Jesus asked St. Peter the same question three times, and he gave the same answer three times. But the subtlety of the Greek language is lost in our English translations, for it uses two different words for the word "love." Our Lord + Jesus asks St. Peter if he loves him with "agape" love. The love that embodies love of will. It is love that chooses to love, because it will to love. In St. Peter's response, however, we see his humility, for he uses "phile" love. The love that embodies affection for another person.

St. Peter is not confident of his own heart. His actions certainly did not embody agape love. He did not choose the Lord + Jesus, but denied Him three times. He is confident enough to assert that that he has affection for the Lord. But our Lord desires to restore to St. Peter the confidence he had before, and so in the third time the Lord asks St. Peter if he loves him, he uses the word "phile." This is why St. Peter is so grieved, because the Lord questions him if he even has the love that he has confessed to having two times. St. Peter has learned by this time to trust in the Lord + Jesus. He does not even offer a defense of his previous answers, but leaves all things in the hand of the Lord. "You know all things; You know that I love you."

The Lord + Jesus already knew that St. Peter loved Him. The events after the resurrection of our Lord prove that. But our Lord teaches St. Peter this truth; He shows him that he indeed does love Him. It is with this knowledge that St. Peter can then faithfully carry out the calling that the Lord + Jesus entrusts him with: feeding and shepherding His lambs and sheep that He bought with His own precious Blood. When St. Peter realizes his own failings, and how much of a sinner he truly is, then he can serve better the saints entrusted to his care, for he realizes that salvation is not found in him at all. It does not matter if he is a gifted speaker, or well-liked, popular person. It only matters that he understands what it means to be forgiven by the Lord + Jesus. For the sheep and the lambs are also daily plagued by sin and shame from living in this world.

Such is the task of the pastors, bishops and deacons who have been called to minister to the lambs and sheep of the Lord + Jesus. We are called to bring you the Gospel of our Lord + Jesus Christ, to place into your ears and your mouths the forgiveness that He won for you on the tree of the holy cross. Such was also the calling of the saint we celebrate today, the Blessed St. Timothy of Ephesus, Bishop and Confessor. He was entrusted with the care of the saints of Ephesus as their first bishop. We even have two epistles from St. Paul addressed to him, which outline his care for those sheep, and give us an example today of how to care for the sheep of the Lord + Jesus.

Therefore, let us give thanks today for St. Timothy, who faithfully carried out his calling, and fed and shepherded the lambs and sheep of Ephesus. And let us pray for all those ministers in our midst who have been called to place into your ears and mouths the good pastures and cool waters of the Word of God and the Blessed Sacraments. For, these things are our comfort and protection from the daily assaults of the devil, the world, and our own flesh. These men have been sent by the Lord + Jesus for your benefit. For He cares for your eternal soul, and even when we fall into sin, He desires that we be restored to Him, just like He did for St. Peter. Thanks be to God for all His mercies. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory! I will extol Thee, O Lord, and I will praise Thy Name forever and ever. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!