

Misericordias Domini
St. John 10:11-16
April 26th, 2020
Sts. Peter & Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

I Lay Down My Life for the Sheep

In Nomine Iesu!

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

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

Lord God, heavenly Father, Who of Thy Fatherly goodness hast been mindful of us poor, miserable sinners, and hast given Thy beloved Son to be our Shepherd, not only to nourish us by His Word, but also to defend us from sin, death, and the devil: We beseech Thee, grant us Thy Holy Spirit, that, even as this Shepherd doth know us and succor us in every affliction, we also may know Him, and, trusting in Him, seek help and comfort in Him, from our hearts obey His voice, and obtain eternal salvation, through the same, Thy Son Jesus Christ, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, one true God, world without end. Amen.

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

An hireling flees because he does not care about the sheep. He allows the wolf—that devil of old—to devour the sheep. He flees from the danger. In this he reveals that he does not care for the sheep. A good shepherd cares for the sheep. He feeds the sheep with good pasture and provides fresh water for the sheep. A good shepherd seeks the lost sheep and brings them back into the fold, so that they too might find protection from lurking wolves. These truths that our Lord + Jesus preaches on today, are spiritual truths. He is the Good Shepherd. He is the One Who willingly lays down His life for the sheep. He guards and protects His flock from the wolf that seek to devour us—sin, death and the devil.

Our Lord + Jesus desires to bring all mankind into the sheepfold of the Church. He desires that mankind be brought out of the wilderness of sin and shame—the wilderness where the wolf devours men's souls—into the green pastures of the Church. The world is the wilderness. Being the kingdom of the devil, it spreads the lies of the devil. The world does not want any of us to find peace; the peace that our Lord + Jesus told the Church, through the Apostles, to bring to the lost sheep of the house of Israel in last Sunday's Gospel reading. The world wants men to remain in their unbelief. It wants us to remain in impenitence. It wants us to not know everlasting joy, but to remain in danger from everlasting death, as we prayed in the Collect of the Day.

We who live in this world are in constant danger. We would not cease from praying and studying God's Word if we truly knew how many slings and arrows were pointed at our heads; if we knew how many wolves prowl around us all ready to devour us. We can easily see the wolf in the world. In any place in this world where the Church is being persecuted; where Christians are told their beliefs do not matter, or they are not permitted to worship, there the Church is being persecuted. Wherever the teachings of the Church are mocked there the Church is being persecuted—we are being persecuted.

The wolf—the devil—wants this to happen, because out of fear it drives poor lost sheep further away from the Church. No one wants to be associated with weird and strange groups. The wolf uses

this language of the world to draw us away from the Good Shepherd. It wants us to remain in despair. The devil wants our destruction. He wants us to end up with him in the eternal destruction of Hell. Therefore, he sends out his agents of the world to do everything in his power to shy away from finding true peace. If he can get us to believe that the Church is some cult we need to flee from, he has won, for he has driven us away from the pasture of the Church. He has managed to keep us in the wilderness. He has managed to drive us into starvation and thirst for peace.

An hireling allows this to happen, because he does not really care for the sheep. An hireling—a false and dangerous preacher—does not correct the sheep when they go astray. He does not bring the sheep to good pasture and pure waters through the right administration of the Sacraments and the preaching of the pure Word of God in all of its truth and purity. Under the guise of love the hireling destroys the flock and allows the wolf to devour the sheep, for he does not drive away the lies of the world and our flesh.

This is not the example with which our Lord + Jesus leaves us. He willingly lays down His life for the sheep. He comes into the wilderness of the world, and in the devil's own kingdom lays down His life so that He might draw all people to Himself. He lays down His life so that He might bring us into His Kingdom. We are in this pasture of the Church. We have heard the voice of the Shepherd, through the preaching of the Word of God from the pastor's lips and through the Sacraments that the pastor administers on behalf of the Lord + Jesus. Through these means the Holy Ghost is cleaning out our ears and removing the scales from our eyes, so that we may see and hear our Lord + Jesus, and believe. The Holy Ghost creates and sustains faith in us, so that we may see our Good Shepherd; so that we may see that He has laid down His life for us.

We who live in daily sin and shame—for we daily and often break the Commandments of the Triune Lord God—are unworthy of the grace that our Shepherd shows us. Instead of leaving us to endure the dangers of everlasting death, He dies in our place so that we may enjoy perpetual gladness as His faithful ones; those who cling to the Lord + Jesus in faith. And as we saw in last Sunday's Gospel, the Lord + Jesus even prepared the Church for His eventual Ascension to the right hand of God the Father, when He breathed on His Apostles and told them to receive the Holy Ghost. Ten days after the Lord's Ascension, the Holy Ghost would descend upon them like tongues of fire, and they would preach to the crowds gathered in Jerusalem, and they would hear and believe.

This same Word of God goes out to us today. This same preaching fills our ears. It is meant to drive away the devil. It is meant to lead us into repentance, so that we are rightly ashamed of our sinfulness, and that we might cling in faith to the only salvation that we have—the Lord + Jesus Christ and His sacrifice of atonement for us and all mankind on the tree of the holy cross. The Lord + Jesus desires to bring us into His Kingdom. He desires to lead us into the pasture of the Church. In which all of us sheep cling to our Lord + Jesus in faith. In this Church He daily and richly feeds and nourishes us on the pure pastures of the Word of God. In the Church He daily guards and protects us from the assaults of the devil, who desires to lead us out of this pasture into the wilderness once again by making men believe that the Church is some sort of weird cult that does not love people and only seeks their harm.

Do you not see how the devil twists the Word of God around? How the world with its constant lying tries to usurp the word "love" and change its meaning from what our Lord would teach? Love by its very definition means to sacrifice oneself for another. When we love someone, we gladly and willingly give up our will for the sake of the one we love. We leave all selfishness behind. Our will does not matter, but the care and nurture of the one we love takes precedence. Our Lord + Jesus shows His love for us—He shows that He is not an hireling—when He lays down His life for us, His sheep. He does what the Father wills. The heavenly Father willed that His One and Only-Beloved Son lay down His life for us. The Son obeyed the Father's will. He came down from Heaven and was incarnate by the

Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary. In doing so, He became our Brother. As our Brother, He offered up Himself as a once and for all time sacrifice of Himself on the tree of the holy cross.

He was both High Priest and Sacrifice. He was both Shepherd and Sheep. He was the spotless Lamb Whose shed Blood redeems all mankind from eternal death. He has atoned for our sins and the sins of all mankind, so that all those who believe on Him—who cling to this sacrifice in faith—may enjoy perpetual gladness in Heaven.

All of us who cling to our Lord + Jesus—the Good Shepherd—are gathered together into one flock; the one flock of the Church. We have One Shepherd. Our Good and gracious Shepherd is the Lord + Jesus. Under this Shepherd we are forgiven of all our sins, by the Blood that He shed on the tree of the holy cross. We cling in faith to this sacrifice for us, because it brings us eternal life. This is why we ignore the lies of the world that want to have us remain in the wilderness of eternal death and destruction. We ignore the lies of the devil, the world and our sinful flesh, and we cling to the truth preached by our Lord + Jesus. We hear His Voice, and we gather around Him. His Voice is heard through the faithful and pure preaching of the Word of God. His Voice is heard through the right administration of the Blessed Sacraments. His Voice is heard in the good pastures of the Church.

This is what our Good Shepherd, our Lord + Jesus Christ, desires for us. He desires to bring us out of the wilderness, to rescue us from the lies of the hirelings in this world, and bring us into the pasture of the Church. When we come to this place—to this sanctuary and pasture—we find solace and peace; we find ourselves in the Kingdom of God. Here in this place where we hear the Voice of our Good Shepherd, we are fed with the pure preaching of the Word of God and are given the pure drink of the Blessed Sacraments. In this place we find a safe place in this world which constantly seeks to devour us and leave us in eternal sin and shame. In this place, in which we live surrounded by the wilderness of the world, we find a good pasture.

This pasture is where our Lord + Jesus feeds and nourishes us, and keeps us safe from the prowling devil. This pasture where we gather today, is the pasture of the Church on Earth. It is a great pasture! It is wonderful to be in the Church, where we hear all about what our Lord + Jesus has done for us. This certainly sustains us as we traverse this dark world, which only seeks our demise. But this pasture in which we live and find protection is only a temporary pasture. Our citizenship is in Heaven.

We enjoy a foretaste of what it is like to be citizens of Heaven, as we weekly rehearse the eternal Liturgy of the Lamb in His Kingdom. But our citizenship in this life is always under attack. We are hounded by the wolves on all sides. Countless slings and arrows are aimed at our heads. Our enemies are constantly at our gate ready to tear down the walls and destroy our pasture; our enemies constantly seek to take the Church—our good pasture where we hear the Voice of our Good Shepherd—away from us. Our citizenship in this life is always under attack.

When our Lord + Jesus calls us out of this vale of tears to Himself in Heaven—when He calls us to our eternal home—we will know only eternal peace. The war will be over. There in Heaven we will celebrate the eternal victory parade as we worship our Good Shepherd, our Lord + Jesus for all eternity. The Lamb Who was slain for us will be our eternal Good Shepherd. We will enjoy perpetual gladness and eternal joys, for our Lord + Jesus in true love has laid down His life for us, so that He might rescue us from our enemies, lead us out of danger of eternal death, and bring us to our eternal home in Heaven. Our citizenship is in Heaven. It is there we long to be, and it is there to where our Lord + Jesus will someday bring us, because He has laid down His life for the sheep, and taken it up again from the grave. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Thou Good and Faithful Shepherd, Jesus Christ, Who, of Thy infinite love, didst lay down Thy life for the sheep, we give Thee praise and glory for this Thy unspeakable grace and mercy; and we beseech Thee, feed us upon the pleasant pastures of Thy Word, give us to drink of the waters of salvation, and guide us by Thy Holy Spirit, that, as Thou knowest us, and dost continually minister to our need, even so we also may know Thee, gladly hear Thy voice, and follow Thee, and by Thee be delivered from all our foes, until the whole flock shall be gathered in Heaven about Thee, Who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The Votum:

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

Soli Deo Gloria!