

## The Fourth Sunday of Easter

### John 10:11-18

Christ is arisen indeed, and we are still on that, and have not got over it; Christians never do, get over that, that is, that Christ is arisen.

And although I suspect that in the minds of most, the imagery of our Lord Jesus as the Good Shepherd evokes other images, mostly rather romantic and idyllic ones, what what we hear today presents to us is, in fact, the fact that Christ is arisen, that He is no longer dead, who died for the sin of the world, which means that we who have sinned, and still do, are nevertheless right with God and righteous before His judgement, and that that it what is most precious to God, because God is that good, as we hear our Lord Jesus saying it, that *the Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep, and that therefore my Father loves me, because I lay down my life so as to take it up again, and that no one takes it from me, but I lay it down of myself, and that I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again, as He has. He is arisen. He is arisen indeed. Alleluia. Alleluia, indeed. He lives, who died for us, and in whom we have died, and so we shall live with Him in that fullness of life which is His. Nothing is greater than that. Alleluia.*

What we have before us when we make the confession He has laid in our mouths by having had it written into Holy Scripture, that *the Lord is my Shepherd*, as well as when we hear Himself saying it, as we do today, that *I am the Good Shepherd*, it is not an idyllic imagery of green pastures and quiet waters, or rather, it is not *only* that; it is also the Son of God crucified, *given over into death for our trespasses*, as the holy Apostle Paul writes that He was, *and raised to life for our justification*, that is: to make us right with God and righteous before His judgement. Yes, for it is for that that He was raised: for our *justification*. As the Apostle also writes it, *if, while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, so much more, now that we have been reconciled, shall we be saved by His life*. Not only by His death is the Son our Saviour, but also by His life. He stands for us as our heavenly High Priest before the Father, and brings in remembrance what He has done for our salvation, and presents His Church and His Christians to the Father pure and perfect, free from all impurity, all on account of the life He has lived for us, and the death He has suffered for us.

And we are saved by His life, also, as He lives with us, in His Church, and gives to us, for real, the salvation He was won for us, when He claims us as His own, with His Word of the price He has paid for us to be that, and *makes us to be that* by breathing His own life into us, and His love, so that we come alive from the death of disobedience and defiance, and begin to believe in Him, and to love Him, and also when He gives His body and blood to us to eat and drink, for real, with the bread and wine of His festive meal of salvation.

The Good Shepherd who laid down His life for us has now returned to the heavenly life that was always His, in the glory of God the Father, and gives His heavenly life to those who are His own.

Now, the Latin word for *shepherd* is *pastor*; directly translated it means *one who feeds*. And the Good Shepherd feeds His flock with Himself and what is His. And this He does through the men He places in His Church as *Pastors*, and that is why we call them that, because they are there to carry out and continue His own shepherdly care for His flock. As Holy Scripture tells us that the holy Apostle Paul admonished the Pastors of Ephesus: *Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to shepherd the Church of God which He purchased with His own blood.*

Now, as the imagery of our Lord Jesus Himself as the Good Shepherd will often evoke images that are not entirely on point, so there is much misunderstanding, also, as to what *shepherding* itself is, particularly when it comes to the duties of a Pastor. There are those whose idea of the Pastor as shepherd assumes that a good shepherd is one who will *pet* the sheep rather than one who will protect them from predators and lead them where it is good for them to be, and where they should be; a good shepherd, they think, is one who will make the sheep feel good about themselves and what they do when they go where they want to go, and where the wolf would have them go. If a member of the congregation wants the Pastor to feed the congregation with something other than Christ and what is His, it is his duty to do so, some think, and leave the faithful of the flock to perish without the Word of Christ and His salvation. Some insist that the shepherd pet the wolf as well, at least if the wolf wears sheep's clothing and claims membership in the Church; Pastor should not call false teachings false when somebody seeks to impose them upon the congregation, either outright, by advocating them, or spiritually, by communing in the congregation while also being engaged in religion that is contrary to the faith.

The Pastor, though, is under command, and a completely different command at that. *I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd* has had His holy Apostle Paul write to his apprentice Timothy, and to all the men the Good Shepherd would call into the ministry, *who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His Kingdom: Preach the Word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.* Whether welcome or not, the Truth of God must be taught at all times, even when some would rather not hear it. Therefore is it, also, that although to some it seems it a good and right and Christian thing to do to make life miserable for their Pastor in order to run him out if they or other unbelievers in the community do not care for him, it will usually not be all that easy to do; as we hear it today that our Lord Jesus says it, only the *hireling* will flee at the sight of the wolf, who does not care for the sheep, nor for his Master, or theirs, and leave the faithful of the flock to the will and whims of wolves in sheep's clothing. Only when the Good Shepherd calls him to is a Pastor free to go elsewhere, except that then he has no choice, and to entrust it to the Good Shepherd to provide another faithful shepherd to tend to the faithful of the flock. Until then, a Pastor is bound to be where the Good Shepherd has called Him to be, and do what He has commanded Him to do, *preach the Word, in season and out of season,* and put up with whatever comes with it in the meantime. And the command to *preach the Word* applies to all that the Good Shepherd has entrusted to His Church, in Holy Scripture, and entrusted it to her and her servants, and His, to preach and teach. It applies to all that He teaches in Holy Scripture as to how He would have His Christians behave and believe and think about the things of God, and also about some of the things of the world, although not all: *All Scripture is breathed out by God, as He has also had His Apostle write it, and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.*

More than anything, though, the Word with which the Good Shepherd sends His servants, and sets them to preach and teach in the particular congregations in which He places them, is His Word of *salvation*. Nothing takes priority over that. It is with regards to this Word the holy Apostle John recounts that our Lord Jesus said: *The words I have spoken to you are Spirit and life; the Word He has spoken of Himself, that is, who is the Word of life, and gives life to the world.*

That word is Spirit and life; for in it He speaks, who is Himself the Fount and Fullness of Life, and breathes His Spirit and His life into the hearts of those who hear it. In the Word of His love is the power of His love to win those over for His love, who are His own, that is: those whom the Father has given to Him from eternity. As He has also had His holy Apostle John relate that He said it: *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. And I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.*

In the preaching of His faithful Church, those who have ears to hear will hear His voice: they will sense that it is Truth from God, His promise of full forgiveness for all sin, of rescue from eternal death and damnation, of eternal life with Him in His Kingdom. They will sense that in His Word of love, the greatest love of all speaks, the love of which we also hear Him speaking today, when He says: *I am the Good Shepherd; I know my own, and my own know me, just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.*

He knows those who are His own; He knew us from eternity, and loved us, with that very love which was forever between the Father and the Son, and the Holy Spirit also, for that matter. It is out of this love the Father sent the Son into the world for the salvation of sinners. And it is was out this love the Son suffered for the salvation of sinners, as was the Father's will, and His own, and in this the Father delights; as we also hear it today that He says it: *Therefore my Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. This command I have received from my Father.*

And this the Son did willingly, not only because of the Father's love for us, but also because of His own, because our salvation was His will, also, from eternity; as we also hear it that He says it: *No one takes my life from me, rather, I lay it down of myself. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. He is God from eternity, one with the Father, not only in glory and being God, but also in goodness; well, the goodness of God is His glory, and therefore is it that nothing is greater to Him, nothing more precious, than our salvation.*

Our salvation is His eternal will. Therefore He laid down His life for us. And therefore He will still shield us and lead us with His Word, and feed us with what is good: Himself and what is His.

Worthy is Christ, the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing. *Amen.*