

“For the Sheep”

Liturgical Date: Easter 4-Good Shepherd Sunday (A)

Primary Text: 1 Peter 2:19-25

Christ is Risen!

He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. The primary text for today, the Fourth Sunday of Easter, is the Epistle Lesson from 1 Peter Chapter 2. The Fourth Sunday of the Easter season is known as “Good Shepherd Sunday”, when the readings point us to the fact that Jesus is our Good Shepherd. We specifically see that in the last verse of Epistle Lesson Today. The title of the sermon is, “For the Sheep”. JESUS CALLS HIS SHEEP TO BE SERVANTS, FOLLOW HIM EVEN IF IT MEANS SUFFERING, AND ULTIMATELY BRINGS HIS SHEEP TO DELIVERANCE.

The first part of our reading for today actually has some very practical and applicable advice. This section of St. Peter’s first Epistle is about authority and submitting to it. While it is not part of the assigned text for today, the preceding verse (18) gives some valuable context. It reads as thus, *“Servants be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the unjust.”* This helps us understand the context of verses 19-20, which began the reading. Specifically, it is talking about servants submitting to their masters. In our contemporary context this would relate to how we, as Christians, work for our employers.

Think of the different bosses that you have had in our life. Perhaps you have always been self-employed. But even then, you have a boss. Your boss

would be your customer because they are spending their money for you to provide a good or service, and if you don't, they effectively "fire" you by not giving you their business. But most people have had a boss at some point in their lives. Maybe you are thinking a particular good boss right now. One that was fair, provided constructive criticism when you made a mistake, and genuinely cared about you a person. On the other hand, you may be thinking of a particularly bad boss. This person may have been cold and uncaring, belittled you verbally, and never seemed pleased with anything that you did no matter how hard you worked. This is the person that you think of if you ever hear that old Johnny Paycheck song, "Take This Job and Shove It, I ain't working here no more."

But notice the Bible does not provide us with any escape clause that says you don't have to be respectful and work hard, even if your boss is a jerk. That verse I read to you specifically said to submit and be respectful no matter if they are "good and gentle" or "unjust." Now, of course, in our day and age you are free to find another job if you are in a bad boss situation. But, as long as you work there, the Christian is to be respectful and hard working.

And then we see in verse 19 that we serve God if we suffer wrongfully at the hands of our employer. Yes, the job and or boss may stink, but if you are respectfully working hard and doing your job-yet still suffer-this is still honoring to God. Verse 20 draws the direct contrast, "*For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God.*" You see, if we are a bad worker and are disciplined for that-then we really have no one to blame but ourselves. I know that have had jobs before where I messed up and I deserved to

be gotten on to, and I know of other times when I got in trouble and didn't do anything wrong!

What does all this have to do with sheep? Well, why do shepherds have sheep? They could be shepherd hired to work for someone else who owns the sheep. But they could actually own the sheep under their care, this is the case with God, our good shepherd. But in an earthly sense, a shepherd who owns a flock of sheep does so to make money. We may think of sheep as cute and cuddly. However, in reality they can be dirty and smelly animals. They can be stubborn, and frankly not that smart. But the point is that shepherd has the sheep in order to earn a living. In the same way, when we work for someone else, they are almost certainly not giving us the job as a charity case-we work for them to make them money. Therefore, our fair and hard work is owed to our employer. They have agreed to pay us, and we agree to do what we were hired to do.

Let's turn to the more spiritual elements of this passage, though. We have seen in a practical sense we may have times when we are happy at work and have good bosses, but then we may times when we don't really like our jobs and are not treated fairly. In these times that we are not treated justly or kindly, we may be called to suffer some. Why? That doesn't seem so fair. Well, it may not be fair-but in this we see a picture of Jesus Christ, our Good Shepherd. Think about it. What did Jesus do wrong? Nothing. Literally nothing. He never sinned, not once. Yet, Jesus still suffered. He was rejected by most of His own people, His own family was not always supportive of His ministry, then of course He was tried in a kangaroo court, beaten to a pulp, and then sent to die an agonizing and gruesome death on the cross. What if Jesus had said, "This is isn't fair. I haven't

done anything wrong. I quit"? That is a rhetorical question, because that would obviously be very bad for us if He did that.

The fact is that the Christian should not be surprised when Jesus sees fit to hand you a cross and say, "Follow me." Christ never promised a bed of roses for His disciples. He said it would be hard. People would hate you. There would be rough times in staying faithful to the Gospel. At the same time, Jesus as our Good Shepherd, promised to always be with us. He does not send us to "go in alone." Verse 21, *"For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps."* We walk in the steps of Jesus, and His steps were not often easy. Verses 22-23 are what I told you just a bit ago. He did nothing wrong, yet He still suffered. He still carried on and completed His mission.

And we know what that mission was, right? It was to save His sheep, by dying for them. He would be the one, as St. John 10 proclaimed to us, that came to give life and give it abundantly. To be the door into heaven, to eternal salvation. And He did this for His sheep by going to the cross. Verse 24, *"Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness-by whose stripes you were healed."*

It was on that tree of the cross, that God in the flesh, bore our sins in a real physical body. One that could feel real physical pain, bleed, and die. In by the stripes across His back and the nails through His flesh, we were healed. Healed of a disease that is fatal 100% of the time, sin. Sin always leads to death, and on the cross to Jesus' death, that we may live. His righteousness would become our righteousness and we can be in the presence of the Holy Father God.

And it was more than physical pain, much more. The spiritual anguish would be even worse. A former pastor once asked the congregation in a sermon, "Which person in history had the most sin?" Many people were thinking of people like perhaps Hitler, Stalin, or maybe a diabolical serial killer like Jeffrey Dahmer. But the answer is actually Jesus. To restate and be clear, Jesus never once sinned. However, when He went to the cross, He took every sin of every person who ever lived on Himself. The one who knew no sin, became sin for us. He bore those sins. Think about the magnitude and burden of that. The Good Shepherd dying for the sheep. God Himself taking on every wicked act, though, and desire. The sinless one, at that moment, bearing more sin than the most wicked person in history. All for us.

For us sheep. I love how St. Peter, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, makes it so personal as verse 25 begins, "*For you*", yes, "*for you*". For us sheep. The sheep that have not shown the proper devotion and gratitude for the shepherd that cares for us. For us sheep that have stubbornly gone the opposite direction than what God has commanded us. For us sheep that created a stench with sin that is so putrid it wafts to the highest heavens. For us sheep that have done so many stupid things. For us sheep that have can easily fallen victim to those robbers and wolves in sheep's clothing. Yes, for us, for you. As the verse said, "*like sheep that have gone astray.*" But the Good Shepherd did not give up on us. He did not throw up His hands and say, "I don't get paid enough for this." Like in that beloved parable, He goes out and finds the lost sheep. Even those that once were in the sheep fold but have wandered away. The child raised in the Church, but who drifted away into the world. For the once faithful church member who fell victim to the popular philosophy of our times that says, "You

don't have to go to church to be a Christian, so why go?' For the one who has sinned in such a way that they slink off in shame, falsely thinking themselves not being able to be forgiven by God.

For those and so many more, the Good Shepherd has bought and sought the lost sheep. He brings the straying sheep back to the sheep fold. And Jesus is our Good Shepherd. He is the "overseer" or as the KJV says "bishop." These are the New Testament words that are our essential equivalent of "pastor." And that is what "pastor" means, a shepherd. One who cares for the sheep, protecting them, feeding them. Yes, you have a pastor in your local church. But ultimately, they are under-shepherds to the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ. Jesus the ultimate pastor, the ultimate shepherd. A shepherd willing to, and who did, die for the sheep. He bore our sins on the tree and defeated death, emerging from the tomb to live evermore.

Christ is Risen!

He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Amen.