

Misericordia Domini, 2006
Text: John 10:11-16
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✠Grace, Mercy, and Peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ ✠

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

The Lord is your shepherd – this means that you shall not want. But it also means that you are a sheep. Do not be too proud to accept this title which the Lord gives you. For it is the Lord Jesus who, in today's Gospel lesson, calls Himself the good shepherd and you his sheep. St. Peter also reminds us as of first importance that it is Jesus who is pastor, that is shepherd, of our souls. So God again and again calls you a sheep. Again I say, do not be too proud to accept this title.

For if you have ever met a sheep then your pride might object to being called one. They are smelly, dirty, weak, and none too bright. They wonder off and fall into ditches or get stuck in fence rails. Left to their own devices they are defenseless against predators and liable to eat weeds that are poisonous to them unless they are led into green pastures of nutritious grass. They are hopeless and helpless on their own.

And now do you see why our Lord calls us sheep? Is this not a picture of your spiritual condition? Before baptism we are all born filthy and unclean in our sins – and after baptism, though forgiven in Christ, that old stinking sheep of our sinful flesh still hangs about our necks. Even now, if left to your own devices you will wonder off and fall into sin. And like a sheep who grazes on poisonous weeds have you not also fed on

just about anything other than the Word of God – have you not fed on the poisonous weeds of gossip, and images in magazines and on television that excite your lust, and do you not ruminate on thoughts of revenge against your enemies and thoughts of resentment toward those who have an easier life than yours?

Dear sheep of the Good Shepherd, repent of all this. Turn back to your Shepherd and heed only his voice. For all other voices are there to call you away to your eternal death. Only Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is the true Pastor and Bishop of your souls. So leave your fear and your doubt and your love for all else and cast your faith, hope, and love on Jesus Christ.

For behold, he is a Shepherd like no other. Not only does he lead you beside quiet waters where he washes you clean in baptism and thus restoreth your souls in the paths of his own righteousness for his Name's sake; not only does he anointeth your head with the oil of healing in the Holy Spirit through this washing of rebirth and renewal; but he also stands fast when the wolf comes. He is not a hired hand like those false pastors who abandon the sheep in the face of their enemies. He is the Good Pastor, the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. The wolf is the great enemy of the sheep – and your great enemy is the unholy trinity of sin, death, and the devil. These lie all around you – and thusly do you walk through the valley of the shadow of death. Death is bad enough – but when coupled with sin it leads to an eternity in the devil's kingdom. But behold – you can walk in this valley of the shadow of death and still fear no evil. For when the wolf comes, the Good Shepherd is with you, and he lays down his life. He plants his rod in the ground and lays his staff across it at a right angle – and that makes a

cross on which the Good Shepherd may lay down his life for the sheep. The wolf of death and sin and the devil take him instead of us. The shepherd dies for sheep that loved to wonder. Truly the two beams of his cross, his rod and his staff, they comfort you.

And what is more, in the midst of this valley of the shadow of death, in this fallen world, in the presence of sin and death and the devil, in the presence of thine enemies – he prepareth a table for you. And this Table is richly adorned for a great feast. For surely your chalice runneth over with the very wine of heaven, the very Blood of Christ, the Good Shepherd, who shed that blood and puts it in you for the forgiveness of sins. Thus, how could mercy and goodness not follow you all the days of your life? Your Shepherd has fed you with his very Body and Blood – with his own Self – surely you will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

So fear not sheep. The Shepherd loves you. No one – not even death – can snatch you out of his hands. For he laid down his life in your place and killed the wolves of sin, death, and the devil with his own Big Death. Your little death belongs to Christ now. It can do you no harm. Be at peace. The Lord is your Good Shepherd. You shall not want. He has led you beside still waters and restored your soul. Today his Table is prepared before you in the presence of your enemies - and you are invited.

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

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Now the peace of God which passes all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

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