

The 4th Sunday of Easter
April 25, 2021

The Lessons: Acts 4:1-12
 Psalm 23
 1 John 3:16-24
 John 10:11-18

The Hymns: # 709 (1-3) *The King of Love My Shepherd Is*
 # 740 (1-3) *I Am Jesus' Little Lamb*
 # 709 (4-6) *The King of Love My Shepherd Is*

The Collect: Almighty God, merciful Father, since You have wakened from death the Shepherd of Your sheep, grant us Your Holy Spirit that when we hear the voice of our Shepherd we may know Him who calls us each by name and follow where He leads; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever. Amen.

The Sermon:
Ego Sum Pastor Bonus
 John 10:11-18
 Easter 4

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.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Perhaps you know that one of the tactics that kidnapers use is to dress up in the uniform of the National Guard or the police. When the driver stops the car, thinking that it is a checkpoint, the kidnapers attack and take their hostages.

Why does this tactic work? It's because people respect the uniform. The uniforms of the National Guard or the police are symbols of the government's power. They identify someone who is authorized to use force of arms to protect the public. It is very bad for anyone to abuse the emblems of the government. But, sadly, a uniform in itself does not make a soldier or a police officer. What does is the training and the commitment to protect the people.

Why do we have an army or police? Couldn't everyone just protect themselves? We are not all equal in this respect. Suppose I gave a 6 year old girl a pistol and said, "Take this pistol to protect yourself on the way to school. It's a good 45-caliber pistol." That wouldn't work, would it?

This is why God has instituted the army, the police and all civil authorities, so that all may have the same level of protection from evildoers. As the Apostle Peter says in his first Epistle, "Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as

supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good."

Pastors also wear a uniform. As God has instituted the civil authorities and given them the right to use armed force in defense of the people, God has instituted the public ministry of the church for the preaching of the Word and administration of the sacraments. This robe and stole have been the uniform of the ministers of the church since ancient times.

Two weeks ago, we read of the establishment of the ministry by our Lord Himself. When Jesus said to His disciples, "As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you...Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld." He instituted the ministry, not as a human institution, rather as one commanded by Christ.

"If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld. That means first the Law must be preached so that sinners may repent. If they do not repent, they will not receive forgiveness, but condemnation. If they repent, we preach the Gospel and they do receive forgiveness of their sins. This is the complete Word of God, which is more powerful than guns because the judgment of God is for eternity.

So our Lord Jesus Christ entrusted the authority to publicly preach the Word and administer the sacraments (the Word in a visible, personalized form) to men that He called and trained for the task. Nowadays the church, as the instrument of Christ, the Head of the body that is the church, calls and ordains pastors for the Lord's flocks.

For "pastors" means both literally a caretaker of sheep and a caretaker of God's flocks, that is to say, believers. Although we have a uniform for pastors, it is not the uniform that makes one a pastor, but instead it is the preparation and the commitment to serve the people of God that gives one the right to wear the uniform.

In today's Gospel, Christ says, "I am the Good Shepherd." In Latin this verse says: "Ego sum Pastor bonus", that is, "I am the good pastor". That is to say, He is the true Pastor (Shepherd) of God's sheep and the Model for those who serve in the public ministry of the church.

And He also says, "The Good Shepherd gives His life for the sheep."

In certain circumstances, being a pastor of the church is not that bad a deal. When the church is growing and the congregation is committed and generous, it may be that the pastor's salary isn't that bad, either. Sometimes the pastor enjoys the respect not only of his congregation but of the surrounding community as well.

But a pastor called by Christ and His church is not a hired hand. It is not his purpose to look for the most comfortable assignment, the best pay or the world's respect. His purpose is to represent and imitate Christ in whatever circumstances that he finds himself.

When Christ talked of the wolf, he was talking of the devil and his servants. In every place where we find the church, we will find opposition stirred up by the devil. When the wolf threatens the sheep, where is the shepherd's place? Behind the flock? Of course not! His place is

between the wolf and the sheep.

If the Lord blesses a congregation with a spacious building, many members, talented musicians, and so forth, well and good. We give thanks to God for these blessings. But when the church faces difficulties, which inevitably happens, it is the pastor's mission to stay faithful to the Word of God and not to abandon the sheep. Our Model is Christ the Good Shepherd, Who gave His life for the sheep. We cannot imitate Christ in His sacrifice on the cross, but our call is to follow Him.

Furthermore, it is not the pastor's job to look for the lost sheep only in those areas where the church has a strong presence, but rather more urgently in those areas which do not have the light of Christ. That is why Christ says, "I have other sheep which are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to My voice. so there will be one flock, one shepherd." So it is the right and responsibility of the church to send missionary pastors to all ends of the earth. That's why we pray that God would raise up faithful pastors, who do not see themselves as hired hands, but true ministers of the Word.

We can rejoice that our Good Shepherd did not abandon his flock. It may have looked like that for a while. Betrayed, arrested, shackled, beaten, crucified, he died and the flock scattered. But the Good Shepherd did not abandon his sheep. On the third day he returned, showing himself alive and proving that even death can not separate us from our loving Shepherd. Our Good Shepherd passed through the gate of death so that one day we also will pass safely through that gate into the eternal life of paradise.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.