

***The new commandment* (John 10:11-18)**

\* Dear Friends, today we continue to celebrate Jesus' resurrection and its outcome as much as we are able to embrace. Our readings for today emphasize God's concern towards all people and particularly for the people of his own. During earthly life Christians experience tangible love of their Heavenly Father in many ways depending from how the people listen to and follow the words of their Shepherd. This sermon reflects on two things, it reflects God's love to his people and vice versa.

\* The reality of our days causes some individuals to suffer bad moods as they run into financial and economical problems. Besides, one week ago or so Americans were alerted with the threat of global swine influenza. The level of alertness was estimated to be level five; that is the highest. Tuesday I read news that shocked me. It says, while Mexicans secured themselves from influenza abiding at their homes, the earth was shaken from beneath. In seconds the emptied streets were crowded back, the official said. Being captured by panic attack people left their houses; you might imagine what kind of feeling the people tolerated after such a *contrast shower*. Now, thinking over occurrences throughout the last eight years I saw them as bad as the 9/11 aftermath; war in the middle East, Hurricane Katrina, fires in California and other natural disasters including financial and economical crises, and on top of these calamities we've heard about the new threat of life – the swine influenza upon the earthquake. I don't know what will be the next, but I just want to tie the reality of our days with the message that follows.

\* Now setting aside the world wide anxieties, let's hear the personal consolation as it comes from the very mouth of our Lord, "I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep," (Joh 10:11). Just look at the cover of your bulletins. The script says, "The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." Therefore, if we associate ourselves with the flock of the risen Lord Jesus we should worry less about financial crisis, natural disasters or epidemic; rather we should more readily enjoy the presence of the Lord's Spirit in us that reduces anxiety, (Rom 8:11). In other words instead of being afraid of wolves, allow the Good Shepherd to lead you toward baptismal waters quieted by his presence. Let him take us to green pastures of his kingdom. In response to the false ideas that want to take advantage of our will and spirit, we gather at the church to be fed and drink from the cup poured out for us, (Ps. 23:2,5).

\* Referring your attention to John's Gospel for today you might enjoy the figurative language. There are sheep, flock, shepherd, wolf, hired hand person on the surface. However, to understand this message better we need to expand our nomadic knowledge as far as we are urban people. I found a verbal illustration of a good shepherd portrayed by Deane David (a narrator). Here it is, "In early morning he led forth the flock from the fold, marching at its head to the spot where they were to be pastured. Here he watched them all day, taking care that none of the sheep strayed, and if any for a time eluded his watch and wandered away from the rest, seeking diligently until he found and brought it back. In those lands sheep require to be supplied

regularly with water, and the shepherd for this purpose has to guide them either to some running stream or to wells dug in the wilderness and furnished with troughs. At night he brought the flock home to the fold, counting them as they passed under the rod at the door to assure himself that none were missing. Nor did his labors always end with sunset. Often he had to guard the fold through the dark hours from the attack of wild beasts, or the wily attempts of the prowling thief (see 1 Sam. 17:34)."

\* Reflecting on Deane David's good shepherd imagery, we might have a very good reason to enjoy ourselves as God's flock under the perfect shepherding of Jesus Christ. See, Jesus is the only one person in the history of human civilization who kept the Sinai Covenant perfectly. All things made by the Lord Jesus were made perfectly including the shepherding of his people because no one is lost, except – Judah Iscariot, *the son of destruction*. Having in mind a portrait of our perfect Shepherd Jesus Christ we will fear and doubt less.

\* Now let's take a look at sheep as they are a central part of shepherding. In fact, our text doesn't confirm that the sheep stand for people. However, reflecting on (v. 14) it says, "I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me." From this saying we can infer that Jesus had in mind people, not sheep because among the ordinary people he was known as a carpenter. This idea also can be proved by Greek syntax; it teaches if a sentence omits a direct object, then the meaning must be drowned from a broad context. On top of it, the Old Testamen tradition portrays the people of Israel as God's flock. We read, "And you are my sheep, human sheep of my pasture, and I am your God, declares the Lord GOD," (Eze 34:31). Thereby the word 'sheep' stands here for the people of Israel.

\* Another observation, where is the Scripture says 'my people,' it refers to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah. However, there are two distinctive imageries of sheep/people in the Tradition. For example, in (Rom 9:6) Paul states, "...For it is not everybody who is a descendant of Jacob (Israel) who belongs to (*the true*) Israel." Accordingly, where the Scripture says the 'holy nations,' (Exodus 19:6), it doesn't say on behalf of national Israel, but to the spiritual Israel of believers, both Jews and Gentiles. Significantly, to be called the people of the Lord still doesn't indicate to be favored forever due to the racial identification or being a member of the priestly family. Someone may say, I am chosen because my papa is a clergy, or my parents are Jews, or I experienced the baptism by the Holy Spirit. None of these arguments can be taken in account if there is no adequate response upon one's election. "For they are a rebellious people, lying children, children unwilling to hear the instruction of the LORD," (Isa 30:9) says. Unfortunately among converted Gentiles there is also found rebellion. "They went out from us, but they were not of us; ... " (1Joh 2:19; Act 20:30). The Scripture says that such people are not true Israel, they will not enter to Christ's glory, but in the end they will share their destiny with ungodly, ( Heb 4:2-3).

\* Some scholars quoting the (Rom 11:26) teach that 'all Israel' will be saved. It might good sound for the liberal theologians and who believe them, but the truth is more important than any good sound that comes

out of the overall meaning. Saying 'all Israel' the apostle had in mind the 'remnant,'; in other words all true believers from Jews and from Gentiles, who is the spiritual or new Israel. Therefore, where it says, "I know my sheep and my sheep know me," it also says, "...but you do not believe because you are not part of my flock," (Joh 10:26). Blessed are those whom the Lord call my sheep and doubly blessed those who trust and follow Jesus; they will be never shamed but rewarded. "He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young." (Isa 40:11).

\* Our text three times says, "I am the good shepherd." Jesus is the one who knows his own and he lays down his life for the sheep. There is a distinguished characteristic of the Good Shepherd in which we may take great pleasure. Many times we experienced God's forgiveness as it says, "For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more," (Heb 8:12). The Good Shepherd never leaves his sheep alone, but nourishes and helps them constantly.

\* Now, upon hearing the delightful characteristics of our Shepherd, let's again concentrate upon God's flock. From Matthew we learned that the King will separate one sheep from another in the end of ages. The flock that listened and followed the voice of his Shepherd will be set at his right side. The sheep will be separated on the basis of their behavior. For example, when his own were imprisoned - his own made visits; when his own suffered from disease - his own cared; when his own were in need - his own supported, (Mat 25:40). They are servants for each other. This is the distinguished characteristic of God's flock that is the remnant or spiritual Israel.

\* We shouldn't keep our hand off in view the needy sheep of our Shepherd. "... as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith," (Gal 6:10). Surely, the Lord knows us by name as well as our needs. Of course God's help may come to us from different sources but help we may receive from his own people is always complete and appreciated, (Luk 10:35). By this attitude the flock can be distinguished as well because they are kind hands of their Lord.

\* In the end let's hear one more illustration, in this case it is about the imagery of a bad shepherd. "A young man spent an entire evening telling a girl how much he adored her. He said that he could not live without her; that he would go to the ends of the earth for her; yes, go through fire for her, or die for her. However, on leaving, he said, "I'll see you tomorrow night if it doesn't rain." Unlike love of the bad shepherds, who doesn't care, the love of our Shepherd is unconditional, it doesn't depend from weather or earthquake, or anything else, it remains steadfast even if his elect fall short of his commands. How often we say we love Jesus yet occasionally deny his words by our actions. But in spite of that Jesus remains the Good Shepherd. He continues to call us by name, helping and nourishing us many ways.

Finally, those who were captivated by the acts of his passionate and tangible love responded adequately.

But the Shepherd's love is not given in exchange for our efforts, it remains unconditional, and it also frees us to love truly.

\* After hearing this sermon the global news many not scare you so much if you trust and love the Shepherd. In him our soul found the rest. Even though his flock walk through the valley of the shadow of death, they will fear no evil, because the Shepherd of Israel is with her; his rod and staff comfort her (the church) . He prepares a table before his people; He anoints their heads with oil; their cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow us all the days of our life, and we shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever. Amen.

Beloved flock, grace be with you.

Amen.