

✠ ✠ ✠ JESU JUVA ✠ ✠ ✠

MISERICORDIAS DOMINI / THE THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

Text: St. John 10:11-16

CHRIST IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED! ALLELUIA!

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

Dying is easy. Anyone can do it. Indeed, everyone *must* do it. So too, dying for one's friend or friends is not unheard of. In recent memory, it has become all too common. Ask any man or woman who has faced the horrors of combat. Not many of us are of an age that they may have actually lived through the dark years of World War II, but those who have, as well as those of us who are old enough to have read more than a paragraph about that war in high school textbooks, might remember reading of the battle for the island of Iwo Jima where *"uncommon valor was a common virtue."*

Admiral Chester Nimitz made this now famous remark in reference to the number of Marines and Sailors who were awarded our nation's highest honor, or what has come to be popularly known as the Congressional Medal of Honor, for giving their lives for their comrades and their country during their struggle to wrest that island from the Japanese, who were, at that time, our enemies.

Jesus once said: *"Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends."* Our soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen, along with our civilian police and firefighters are prepared to do just that every day, and sadly, have done so many times over.

Yes, anyone can die, that is, everyone must die and some may even give their life for their friends. But in the end, and I mean no disrespect for the memory and sacrifice of those who have done so, such sacrifice really saves no one, for all sin and therefore all die. That is the sad condition to which all humankind has come. *"All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way..."* *"...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..."* and *"the wages of sin is death...."*

So, everyone must die, and some even give their lives for their friends, but how many people do you know who have given their lives for those who hate them? Would you? Jesus did. St. Paul writes, *"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*

Perhaps you are thinking as you sit there and ponder what I just said, *“But wait a minute Pastor, that verse did not say anything about hate. It speaks of sinners. I know I am a sinner, but I do not hate God.”* Really?

What is sin if it is not hate directed toward God? Is it just poor judgment, perhaps? Is it just our *“acting out”* inappropriately? Is it just harmless, childlike thoughtlessness, and immaturity? I mean, what does it really matter if you tell little white lies now and then? Whom does it hurt if you lust after your neighbor, but never do anything about it? What real harm is done if you fudge a little on your taxes? What business is it of the Church if you refuse to forgive someone and hold a grudge for years? What about gossip, jealousy, or greed? Where is the real harm in any of that?

The fact is, that the harm in these, or any sin for that matter, is that they reflect our natural feeling toward our God; and that feeling is hate, and hate kills. In fact, it is the very reason we die, and, in fact, it is the reason our Lord died. You see, our hate, our sin, killed our God, for Jesus is God in the flesh and it is our hate, our sins against God, that sent our Lord to the Cross.

That, my friends, is the sad and tragic truth of our condition. For on our own, we have nothing to look forward to but the dust of our graves. We are sinners, and sin has as its cost, eternal death. If that were all we poor sinners had to look forward to how wretched we would be. Yet, as we have heard from St. Peter in our Epistle text: *“For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”*

Jesus Christ is your Good Shepherd and He willingly laid down His life for you, His sheep. It was for this purpose that He was born and it was for this cause that He came into the world. The Shepherd gave up His life; He died that His sheep shall live.

But then, how is it that we shall live? We shall live *“by every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”* For we are the sheep of the Good Shepherd who declares, *“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I shall give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.”* The Words of the Good Shepherd, you see, are *“the Words of eternal life.”*

Thus, the sheep know the voice of their Master. His is the only voice to which they respond. In the same way, the Good Shepherd knows His sheep. He has numbered the hairs on their heads and He knows and calls each and every one of them by name. He belongs to them as much as they are His. For them, He has become one with them. He is Shepherd of the sheep and the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. They are joined by Blood, His Blood—His Blood poured out to give them rich and abundant

life. He is the Good Shepherd. He gives His life for the sheep and His sheep hear His voice and follow Him.

But Jesus, our Good Shepherd and the Lamb of God, did not simply lay down His life; the story did not end there. He took His life up again. The Lamb that was slain is dead no longer—He lives! The tomb is empty.

The heel that still bears the scars of Satan's fangs has crushed the head of His enemy and defeated him. For Jesus is not just any shepherd. Any ordinary shepherd may indeed lay his life down for his sheep, but to what end? When the shepherd is dead the sheep are left as prey for the wolf. But Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He has the power to lay His life down and the power to take it up again.

Jesus lays down His life for the very purpose of taking it up again. This is the priestly office and work of the Good Shepherd. It is for this reason that He was born of human flesh. For through His innocent suffering and death, He bestows unto His sheep eternal life, that they should never perish and no one should be able to snatch them away from Him.

He dies the death of His sheep that they will never die. His death satisfies the wrath of the Father. He pays for the guilt of the sheep with His precious Blood, Blood that pours out of Him and into the waters of Holy Baptism where you are baptized into His death for the forgiveness of your sins and raised again with Him in His resurrection as new creations. No longer are you simply sheep. You are sons and daughters of our Father in heaven and brothers and sisters of our risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

That same life-giving Blood He pours into you in His Holy Supper, that with His Body and Blood, you will be strengthened when the wolf comes knocking at your door and you are then able to resist him.

Jesus says, *"I am the Good Shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own."* Sheep know the voice of their master. His is the only voice to which they respond. Jesus is our Master and it is in His Holy Word, given in the gifts of preaching, of absolution, and the blessed Sacraments, that we hear His voice strong and clear. There, Jesus, the Good Shepherd, brings us to green pastures and still waters, to restore our souls and prepare a table for us with cups that overflow with His grace and peace for our joy.

So let us come this day and feast on the Good Shepherd, who is Himself, the very Food He provides for the sheep. Let us feast on the Risen, Living Lord who laid down His life for us. Let us feast and hear the voice of JESUS as He says, *"I am the Good Shepherd, and I have given My life for you that you are forgiven you all your sins."*

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

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