

**MISERICORDIAS DOMINI / THE THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER**

Text: St. John 10:11-16

*ALLELUIA! CHRIST IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED! ALLELUIA!*

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

JESUS said, *“I am the Good Shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own.”* If you are a sheep who dwells in the pasture of our LORD, then you know the voice of your Master. His is the only voice to which you will respond. All other voices fade into the voices and cacophony or background noise of this life. The Master’s sheep do not hear the voices of strangers, and so, do not respond to them because they do not recognize them.

Such selective hearing is much like when one is engrossed in a book, a daydream, or an app on a cell phone. One hears the voices around him or her only in a peripheral sort of way. One may recognize a word here or a phrase there, but one does not respond to them. It is only when one is called by name that one is finally awakened from his or her reverie and hears.

So, my question for you this morning is this: Have you heard your name? The Good Shepherd, our LORD JESUS CHRIST, has called you. Are you listening? Do you hear His voice? Are you a sheep of the Good Shepherd or do you belong to another?

Our Good Shepherd knows His sheep. He numbers the hairs on the heads of His sheep and He knows and calls each and every one of them by name. They are His—they belong to Him even as He belongs to them. They are joined by Flesh and Blood—His Flesh, His Blood; His Flesh given into death for them, and His Blood poured out to give them rich and abundant life. He is the Good Shepherd. He came to give His life for the sheep, and His sheep hear and know His voice and follow Him.

The irony here is that these same sheep, the very same for whom JESUS gave up His life and died, *these very same sheep*, had a hand in the murder of their Shepherd. Their sins killed the One who loved them, but only because He allowed it. No one can take His life from Him; He laid His life down that He may take it up again and shepherd them. JESUS is the Good Shepherd and He loves His sheep to the end.

Yet, there are those who would seek to plunder the Good Shepherd’s sheep. They are not the Good Shepherd and they care not a whit for the sheep because the sheep of the Good Shepherd are not their own. Without a care for the Good Shepherd’s flock they eat the fat of the sheep and clothe themselves with their wool. They neglect the weak and do not give them words of strength. They ignore the sick and do not provide care for the broken. Nor do they seek those who have been driven away. Like wolves in sheep’s clothing, they deceive the

sheep, feeding on them until the sheep are no more. Then they flee, in search of another flock to plunder.

Such a one is not a shepherd, but a hireling. Hirelings serve neither GOD nor Church but only their own stomachs. They do not pastor the LORD's sheep out of love for them, but for temporal earthly rewards. In self-interest, they seek to profit only themselves without any concern at all for the souls of the sheep. Thus, they spend all their time counting the sheep without truly caring for the sheep. Their hearts are set ablaze for the purpose of worldly advantage and honor among men, but the hireling is not at all set aflame with enthusiasm or love for the sheep.

Without regard or compassion for the sheep the hireling will not take a stand when the wolf comes and the sheep are in danger. Because he esteems the honor of men, because he enjoys his worldly advantages, he will not warn, rebuke, or correct the sheep who stray. Instead, he prefers the safety of the golden middle, being neither cold nor hot. So no, the hireling harbors no love for the sheep, but would gladly exchange the sheep for a sack containing thirty pieces of silver.

Therefore, the hireling, all for the sake of false peace, is willing to call an evil thing good and that which is good, evil. As I said, He looks for the safety of the golden middle. He is at home seated comfortably on a fence. His byword is compromise, but this is evil of the worst sort because that which he compromises is the Word of GOD. In compromising the Word of God, the hireling leaves the flock with no defense against the wolf when he stalks and attacks them.

In this world's economy, sheep are raised to fleece, to slaughter, and devour. They are used for food, clothing, and sacrifice. But JESUS, the true Good Shepherd, is different. He does not abuse the sheep nor fleece them for personal gain. He does not sacrifice His sheep, but instead, sacrifices Himself in their place. As a Shepherd in sheep's clothing, God in man has become one of the sheep, and giving Himself into cruel death, He is the universal all-atoning Blood Sacrifice in their place.

Instead of devouring His flock, the Good Shepherd feeds Himself to His flock—His Flesh for them to eat and His Blood for them to drink. Instead of fleecing them, He clothes them in pure garments of His righteousness. When the old evil foe came to ravage His flock, He did not flee. He did not desert them. The Good Shepherd laid down His life on behalf of His sheep. He willingly presented Himself as a Sacrificial Lamb to save them. Becoming one of them, He allowed the wolf to seize Him in their place and rip and tear His Flesh apart. He allowed the wolf to sink his fangs into His heel until He was dead.

But JESUS, the Good Shepherd did not simply lay down His life; the story does not end there. The Good Shepherd took His life up again. The Lamb who was slain is dead no longer. His tomb is empty. The heel that still bears the scars of Satan's fury has crushed the head of His enemy.

For JESUS is no ordinary shepherd. An 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.

In fact, JESUS laid down His life for that very purpose. Dying and rising again for the life of the world is the office and work of the Good Shepherd. It is for this reason the FATHER sent Him to be born of human flesh. For through His innocent suffering and death, the Good Shepherd grants His sheep eternal life so they will never perish, and no one will snatch them away from Him.

JESUS died the death of His sheep that they will never die. His death has completely satisfied the wrath of His FATHER for our sins. He paid for the guilt of the sheep, redeeming them with His precious Blood through his innocent suffering and death. His Blood poured out of Him and into the waters of Holy Baptism where we are baptized into His death for the forgiveness of our sins and raised again with Him in His resurrection as new creations. No longer then, are we simply sheep. We 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 is poured into you in His Holy Supper, that with His Body and Blood you will be strengthened when the wolf comes knocking upon your door, giving you the strength to resist his temptations.

JESUS said, *“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 His sheep respond. JESUS is our Master and it is with His Holy Word, given in the gifts of preaching, absolution, and the blessed Sacraments, that we hear His voice clear and strong. There, through His gifts, JESUS, the Good Shepherd, brings us to green pastures and still waters, restoring our souls while He prepares a table for us with cups overflowing with His grace, mercy, and peace for our joy.

So, let us come this day and feast with the Good Shepherd, our LORD JESUS CHRIST, who is 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 the Good Shepherd who died and rose up again to forgive us all our sins.

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

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