

“Credo, Domine; adjuva incredulitatem meam,” Mark 9:24.

“Domine, volumus Jesum videre,” John 12:21.

1 PETER 2

¹⁸Slaves, submit to your masters with total respect, not only to those who are good and kind but also to those who are harsh. ¹⁹For this is favorable: if a person endures sorrows while suffering unjustly because he is conscious of God. ²⁰For what credit is it to you if you receive a beating for sinning and patiently endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and endure it, this is favorable with God.

²¹Indeed, you were called to do this, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example so that you would follow in his steps. ²²He did not commit a sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. ²³When he was insulted, he did not insult in return. When he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. ²⁴He himself carried our sins in his body on the tree so that we would be dead to sins and alive to righteousness. By his wounds you were healed. ²⁵For you were like sheep going astray, but you are now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.



There is nothing more faithful for a shepherd than to stake out his life for the sheep. Rather than suffer even one lamb to be destroyed, a truly good shepherd of old would undergo a struggle with the strongest beasts of the forest.

Jesus warns in our gospel about a wolf in sheep's clothing. Why would a wolf wear wool like a sheep? So that the sheep could not see its teeth and paws. It's a disguise, a deception, a lie, so that predator can be close enough to prey. A wolf in sheep's clothing knows how to make a meal out of the sheep.

What if you reverse the imagery? What if, in defense of the sheep, there were a Protector who wore sheep's clothing? How this would change the conversation and turn the tables on a predator!

What do you do when your plans fall through ... when the world misleads us and wounds us? The way our Good Shepherd has chosen to outsmart a wolf was through shrewd shepherding ...

THE SHEPHERD IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING

1. For your salvation

In the middle of instructions for Christians in their different vocations—their different stations in life, or callings—St. Peter paints a wonderful portrait of our Good Shepherd's sacrifice. Peter reinforces that our Good Shepherd had to meet death, with death, and be a Substitute sacrifice for us. This Good Shepherd did not die fighting; He died innocently, meekly, silently. He died like a sheep.

Now, for the Son of God to do this, to undergo wounds and death, He would have to be like one of us. He would have to be made man in order to carry our sins on His body, on the tree of the cross. He would need vulnerabilities, the ability to be stricken, smitten, and afflicted, for "*by His wounds*" would the sinners of the whole world be "*healed*."

This is what Jesus Christ did. He came to offer Himself as a ransom for the flock. He would appear as a man—in sheep's clothing, so to speak—and did not flee when He saw the wolf come. In Galilee Jesus was already fully conscious of that crucifixion and death, waiting for Him in Jerusalem, yet He cheerfully turned His steps to that ill-fated city. With a bold and ready mind, He went to meet that roaring lion, the prince of darkness, and ... you might say, the Good Shepherd behaved like a sheep. He allowed Himself to be torn to bits and pieces. He delighted to lay Himself down in the grave.

Sin isn't just an errant path. Sin is a ferocious enemy, a wild animal, that seeks to strip us from the hands of God. Sin brings a battle, and it rages on fiercely. It is clever and it is in disguise. And sin is deadly.

Thanks be to God, for we have a Good Shepherd.

No greater exchange has ever happened than that of the Good Shepherd, who seemed to wear the sheepskin and took our place in a sheepish death. All the paws and fangs of the Enemy were directed at Him, and He was a magnet for punishment we deserved. By His wounds you and I were healed and kept safe.

If you and I were out in the wild and a ferocious predator started to chase us, as the old motto goes, we wouldn't have to be the fastest one. We would simply have to be faster than the slowest one. But if another Friend were with us, and He stopped running on purpose, then the wild animal would take Him instead of us. What a perfect Substitute that would be!

This is our Savior, who defended us with His death on the cross. He delighted to lay Himself down in the grave. He triumphed over both devil and grave. He took back their prey.

In so doing—in putting on sheep's clothing—our Good Shepherd has shown us something. As a risen Lord, the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, laid down His life like a sheep, for the sheep. He secured erring sheep out of misery and converted them. But He also shows the sheep how to respond. The Good Shepherd is in sheep's clothing ...

2. For your imitation

St. Peter in our text was writing to household slaves. It is estimated that half of Rome's population were slaves. Many of them became Christians through the mission work of the early Church. Peter's goal, surprisingly, was not to set right the injustices that have been done in slavery. He doesn't tell the sheep to rise up and bleat bloody murder at the wolves. He doesn't recommend hatred or back-talk or rebellion.

We Christians are not in the same situation as those early Christian slaves. However, we are still in need of an example to follow when life turns up the heat. Peter teaches us that seeing the grace we have experienced must move us to all good things. We are moved to good works, even to suffering evil, through the example of Jesus, who endured evil for us.

Peter reasons it in this way: *Isn't it to your credit if you patiently endure suffering? Isn't that to your advantage, as a witness and testimony to your faith?* Let's say you 'righted' an injustice in your life by acting out and sinning against the authorities; how does that help your standing? Not only do you get a beating, but you deserved it from your actions. Instead, Christians can both be wronged and show love, even to the one who wronged us. In the next chapter, St. Peter rephrases the same concept in the question: "*Why not rather be wronged?*"

To do this, Peter again asks his flock to look to our Good Shepherd. Peter points us to the voice of our Good Shepherd when He was led to the shearers. The Good Shepherd said nothing. He was insulted and cursed, mocked and jeered, wronged and wounded to death, but He didn't raise His voice or curse or swear. *"He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in His mouth."*

St. Peter recognizes that, in a world of sin, injustices will continue. He does not write them off as insignificant or appropriate; however, Peter does explain what a servant, or any Christian, should do when beaten and abused. Peter says, *"You were called to this."* *"Patiently endure"* it. It is the example of Jesus that teaches us to endure trials and hardships.

Refuse to go through this world bleating bloody murder. How is a sinful reaction at all like your Good Shepherd, the Savior Jesus Christ? But if you endure, when it really matters, another erring sheep may bleat in your direction, *"What is the reason for the hope that you have?"* And in your Good Shepherd, you will have an answer.

If Peter writes how not to live in our text, Paul writes us how to live in 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12, *"Make it your ambition to live a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, just as we instructed you. Do this so that you are conducting yourselves decently toward outsiders and are not lacking anything."*

Many sinners who think they are thinking for themselves are really following temptation. Thinking about ourselves with a desire for power or pleasure get us stuck on the path. Sheep are daily wandering from the fold by their sin and piercing themselves with the thorns of many griefs.

But we have a Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd guides and feeds His flock. He leads them beside quiet waters; He makes them lie down in green pastures; He refreshes them body and soul. He has not withdrawn His sympathetic, caring hand. Should we be tormented by our sins? We have God's assurance that Jesus Christ has suffered for them. Should we be tried by sickness or grief? We can look up to Him who is our Shepherd and Overseer. Should we lose heart in the midst of a pandemic? We can know that we rest secure in His loving arms.

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.