

✠ John 10:1-10 ✠

IN NOMINE IESU

The Good Shepherd has laid down His life for you, o sheep, and abundant life is before you. But there are thieves and robbers who come to steal that life away from you. They come not through the Crucified One, but through other ways, ways foreign to God. And they come only to kill you where you stand; to destroy you. They are thieves and robbers and their only desire is that the life the Good Shepherd gives you be taken from you that you may join them in eternal shame and despair.

These thieves and robbers are the henchmen of Satan. He is the chief thief. All lies proceed from him: little white lies and big black ugly lies. They all proceed from the mouth of death. And just as there is the Holy Trinity there is also the unholy trinity. This three-fold evil consists of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature.

The devil sends out his first henchmen of false doctrine. He attacks you by denying God's Word. He moves to rob you of your heavenly inheritance in the same way he robbed Adam and Eve of the pleasures of Paradise. False doctrine is some stuffy academic problem that doesn't affect the average layman. It is a real threat to your faith because false doctrine, wrong belief, is the hinge-pin of following Jesus or following the devil.

The evil one whispers in your ear, "Did God really say...?" Did God really say that Baptism now saves you? Did God really say that the bread and wine are His body and blood? Did God really say that forgiveness comes only by confession? Doctrine is the teaching of the Bible. It is the rule and norm for our faith and life. And so when it is attacked, our rule and norm is attacked and we find ourselves floating in a sea of doubt and confusion. It creates doubt in the divine Word so that soon, instead of simply believing what God says, you're off looking for what God really said, what He really meant when He said, "Baptism now saves you," or "unless you eat My flesh and drink My blood you have no life in you," or "unless you repent, you will perish."

The guard against this attack is to know the Scriptures. Not necessarily to know all the Bible stories and dates and names, anyone can know that. But to know the Scriptures as our Lord Jesus teaches them to us; that they testify that the Christ must suffer and die and on the third day be raised again. And that by His death and resurrection we have peace with God and with one another. Learn all the Bible stories you want, if this truth does not guide your understanding of them, then you are as a ship without a sail, tossed to and fro by every wind of false doctrine and every crafty scheme of men. That is why the Creed is so important. It distills the teaching of Scripture so that even little children can know and confess the faith of the apostles and prophets.

The second thief and robber that enters the sheep fold through unlawful means is the world. The world attacks you through your senses. It sings its siren's song, luring you to chase after gold that rots and silver that rusts. It pulls you away from your eternal treasure, life with Christ, with its tantalizing delicacies of Turkish Delights. And its call is seductive.

God created all that there is and pronounced it "very good". Perhaps there is a part of us that remembers this as we take pleasure in the created world. We enjoy a well-cooked steak and a piece of apple pie. We take pleasure in our daily bread and that which was created for our enjoyment. And we are not wrong in doing so. It is God who gives you your daily bread,

your house and home, clothing and shoes, your wife and children, your job, and everything you have. Just as it was God who created the Garden for Adam.

But when Adam ate the forbidden fruit and fell into sin and shame, all creation fell with him. Adam was both in and of the world, created from the dust of the earth. And so he took the earth, the stars, the sun and the moon, and all that is in them down with him when he thought to be like God. Now what was meant for our good and benefit actually harms us.

In the Garden there was no such thing as too much of a good thing, for it was all good, very good. But now, with our passions at the helm, too much of a good thing is bad. Too much sun burns rather than warms. Too much food kills rather than strengthens. Too much drink enslaves rather than satisfies. Too much pleasure breeds apathy.

But you, O Christian, are re-created. You are no longer of this world, you are of Christ. Too much of this world pollutes and harms you. So you learn fasts from the things of this world, for the indulgence of the flesh does not subdue the flesh. Rather it creates a beast that cannot be satiated, that devours everything and everyone it sees. A glutton is born by the indulgences of the flesh and is killed only by starvation. Starve your sinful lusts and they will die, indulge them and they will master you.

Such pious understanding is fostered when you are encouraged to fast before receiving the Sacrament, to remind you that you do not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Fast from the pleasures of the flesh, not because you are holy but to remind you that you are dependant upon God. He satisfies you, feeding and clothing you. He cares for you, giving you what you need to support this body and life. You life, O Christian, is not in the things of this world, but is hidden in Christ.

The third thief and robber that comes to destroy you is the quite possibly the most sinister because it always hangs about your neck and behind it are the armies of darkness with their prince at the head charging forth in battle cry to finally conquer you and steal your life from you. This thief is you yourself. The devil knows this and so convinces you that you are always the one attacked and never the one who attacks.

Repent. You have daydreamed about extra-marital affairs, and how you would hide them and get away with them. You have hated your neighbor, daydreaming of his demise because things went his way and not yours. You have spoken evil of your wife and children to co-workers and friends to sound manly. You have shamed your husband before your friends to sound wise and humble. You have daydreamed of your boss's failure that you may be proved the hero. You have lusted after the shame and humiliation of others so that you may play the part of the exalted and righteous. Repent.

Humble yourself and be led by the Good Shepherd. Confess your sins and be healed. For God knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked shall perish. It is the devil's lie, meant to lead you astray, that convinces you that you are the one wronged, never the one who offends. And so we walk about as if nothing we do is sinful and wrong, but that we are in full control of our lives and thoughts. But when you feel yourself justified by your thoughts and appeased by your actions, ask yourself, "Do I do or say this because Jesus rose from the dead?" If the answer is "no," turn and repent. For any other reason is from the devil.

The worst sinner is not the fornicator or drunkard; it's not the gambler or drug addict. The worst sinner is the self-righteous sinner; the one who believes that everything he says and does is good and pious and without selfish desires. That one is far from the kingdom of God.

That is why it is necessary to attend preaching and the Sacrament. This is the voice of your Shepherd. Through preaching, He diagnoses your sickness and prepares you to receive the medicine of salvation, His body and blood, healing you of all unrighteousness and giving to you His righteousness. Through confession Jesus purges you of your pride and self-worship, and by the holy Absolution He mends your broken spirit with His Holy Spirit.

It is through His Word that we encounter the living God, the Risen Lord, the Shepherd and Overseer of your soul. If left to our own devices, we would quickly and easily justify our actions and self-serving thoughts, and succumb to pride and the sinful living of self-righteousness.

So come, you drunkards and fornicators, you adulterers and liars. Come, you drug addicts and you who are rude and quarrelsome. Come and be healed. For the Good Shepherd lays down His life for you. He calls you by name and leads you to quiet waters and green pastures, He restoreth your soul. Yea though you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, do not be afraid, for the Lord is your portion. He will preserve your coming in and your going out from this time forth and even forevermore, and you shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Amen.

In the name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT.

✠ AMEN ✠