

Trinity III (16 June 2024)

“What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.”

+In the Name...

This was a favorite story in our household. I do not mean when I was growing up. I was unchurched except for Christmas Eves until fourth grade, so I did not learn all the songs and stories one is normally exposed to in Sunday school. I mean the household made up of my wife and children. Perhaps it was due to my wife having taught pre-K Sunday school and the sheep songs that go along with that. Maybe it is all the sheep jokes: I do not mean the off-color kind they tell in Montana or other sheep

herding capitals, but the puns and double entendre one can compose using the words “wool” and “ewe” are nearly endless! My wife would never forgive me if I got started with them, and I shall also spare you my singing her little song, “I just want to be a sheep: bah, bah, bah, bah!”

I should not joke because this really is not a subject to laugh about. The concept is simple: a shepherd takes care of his sheep because he cares for them. He will risk his life for even one sheep. We are the sheep and God is the Good Shepherd. Jesus went beyond risking his life for the sheep and sacrificed His life on the Cross so that us stubborn, ill-tempered sheep could have eternal life. Being a shepherd is probably something like teaching, there are some sheep one is more fond of than others. But I never wished evil on a student: I wished he might take his studies more seriously or talk less to his neighbors. As Christians we pray for conversion, not that something bad might happen to anyone.

On a more local level, the comparison continues, God uses members of the clergy for His shepherds. That is why in the Church of England the more common term for a Rector is the Vicar. The word “vicar” comes from the Latin word “vicarius” meaning “substitute” or “proxy” for another. Granted, most of us vicars would count ourselves as a poor substitute for Our Lord, but it is the system that He has instituted, and unfortunately, you, the faithful, have inherited.

Where things get particularly edgy, or maybe I should say where the comparison breaks down, is identifying the enemy of the sheep. Bear? Enemy, check. Wolf? Enemy: check. Bad storm? Enemy: check. Steep cliff? Enemy: check. It is particularly obvious that when a wolf shows up at dinner time, he intends to be eating the flock, not inviting them to dine at a formal dinner. The wolves are not always so easy to identify in 21st century America. Yet Our Lord, via the letter of St. Peter, warns us: “Be sober, be vigilant;

because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:”

Yesterday, as I sat in my office working (attempting to complete this sermon, ironically) I heard a horrible crash outside. As you likely know, my office faces the 21st Avenue, but this sounded like it came from our garden. I rushed down the staircase: I looked towards the gate and saw nothing. Then I looked into the garden just in time to see a man raising his hands over his head with the head of what had been the St. Francis statue. I ran outside and asked one of those typically “Dad questions”: “What are you doing?!” It was perfectly obvious what he was doing: he had destroyed our statue. It was in three pieces on the ground amongst rose petals and leaves from our now-former rose bush, arranged like they were trying to be the front cover of the next P. D. James novel. (If she were still publishing.) He muttered something about it having human bones in it. When I argued and said that it was just a statue, he claimed it fell.

Fascinating: it fell from its original location, past several feet of soil immediately beneath it, to where it then laid in ruins. He was collecting his things and heading back out the gate, understandably not wanting to see what might happen next.

Evil was lurking around in our garden. Either the man was truly evil and wished harm on the Parish and its property, or more likely, because he was mentally ill. Now do not misunderstand me: I am not saying that being mentally ill is a sign of the devil at work, but the fact that we as a society cannot do better for our mentally ill brethren than to let him wander around the streets of Portland believing he is doing a public service by destroying private property is not just shameful, but is indicative of evil at work in our society. He after all, is a sheep too.

In general, we can agree that destroying private property is evil. But what about the intrusion of contemporary society into the theology of the Church? There is great stress today on ecumenism: let us stress that which we have in common and not

concern ourselves with our differences. Okay, but at what point do the differences become too important to overlook? Do we as traditional Anglicans oppose reinterpreting the Holy Scriptures because we are old fuddy-duddies refusing to leave the last century behind? Do we oppose reimagining the Holy Sacraments, as agreed upon by the Councils of Holy Mother Church for centuries merely because it seems “tacky” if the Sacraments do not look and sound like they always have? (This should especially resonate with Anglicans, where in many quarters we have adopted “Thou shalt not be tacky” as the 11th Commandment!) No and no. The Church, and especially some small part of the American and Western European Church, has no authority to change the Holy Scriptures or the Holy Sacraments to fit the spirit of our age just because they do not reflect what the culture is saying right now. To quote the late Dean William Inge of St. Paul’s Cathedral in London, “If the Church marries the spirit of this age, she will be a widow in the next” But a widow really puts it too mildly: this is the

equivalent of the shepherd sitting down with the wolf to come up with a sheep-sharing agreement. (Sharing, not shearing.) One can imagine the shepherd announcing to the skeptical sheep with all the sincerity of Neville Chamberlain that in the pasture there will be “peace in our time”. One might think it is more reminiscent of George Orwell’s Animal Farm when the redundant horse gets sold to the knacker by the pigs.

Meanwhile Satan just sits back and laughs. He would much prefer that we quibble and squabble over the non-essentials and the mundane. We saved our favorite gargoyle on the top of the cathedral – you know, the one that always reminded you of your great-Aunt Mildred on you father’s side – while Satan chipped away at the foundation. No one noticed as the Faith once delivered to the Saints, quietly and carelessly was washed away, as if by accident, but oh, so planned!

Make no mistake brethren, the Continuing Anglican Movement was created nearly 50 years ago, not to form a social

club or where we might be a museum for a quaint liturgy once used by a great Empire, but to *maintain the Catholic Faith*, as received by the Early Church, and practiced in the far Western reaches of Christendom. For us to do anything less would be a violation of our baptismal and confirmation vows, and there are still too many lost sheep to count.

+In the Name...