

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Fourth Sunday of Easter
May 3, 2020

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On the first three Sundays of Eastertide we have accounts of the various appearances of the Risen Christ to His followers. In those incidents we begin to understand the great care and tenderness with which the Saviour custom-tailored these resurrection appearances to fit the various personalities of His disciples. On the Fourth Sunday of Easter our attention is turned to a great allegory which sums up the Lord's boundless care for each one who is His own. Today is called *Good Shepherd Sunday*, and the shepherd's care for the sheep is expressed as one of the great themes in Saint's John's gospel. The good shepherd allegory describes the personal relationship of the Saviour to every individual member of His Church.

Saint John wrote his gospel after those of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. This evangelist saw no need to repeat the Lord's fundamental teachings preserved in parables. John was writing to a Church already familiar with the parables. And so St John gave us this beautiful allegory of the good shepherd.

Immediately prior to teaching He is the Good Shepherd, Our Lord Jesus had received into His band of disciples an excommunicated beggar. This is the man born blind whose eyesight Jesus had restored. The Pharisees had questioned this man about how he was cured. When they didn't like the man's answers, they slammed the door of blessing in his face. It is no coincidence that a few minutes later Jesus declared "*I am the door,*" and that all who preceded Him were thieves and robbers.

Today's gospel at Mass is the *first part* of the allegory of the Good Shepherd. In it Jesus identified Himself not as the Shepherd but as *the door of the sheepfold*. In the allegory, the gatekeeper is the Holy Spirit, and the shepherds are the priests of the Church. The sheepfold is the Church, containing the sheep. All who enter must come through the door Who is Christ the Lord. And the keeper of the door is the Holy Spirit.

Christ mentions the sheep briefly in this portion of the allegory. He says they go in and out and find pasture. Coming in and going out, they will find in their Christian faith the strength and meaning for their lives and their involvement in the secular

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world. That will be true even when from the outside their work may look very much like the work done by unbelievers.

All of us in Christ's Church have come through the door that is Christ. As a consequence, we refer all activity, our own, and that of the whole world around us, to the standard of the Mind of Christ. Entering through the door that is Christ means putting Christ in the forefront of our thoughts and actions. Our self, in all its forms, is put right out of the picture *except as transformed by Christ*. Being transformed by Christ does not suppress our liberties and make us miserable! It is rather to insist on the Gospel Good News itself: in accepting Truth, and following the Way, is to come to Life.