

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

There is a sheepfold.

It's got walls all around,
and a front door—the only way in.
It's the place where the sheep come in for food and rest and security—
if sheep could talk, they'd probably call it home.

And so the sheepfold is the gathering place for the sheep.

When the shepherd comes in through the door,
the sheep act just like little children whose Father comes home from work:
they run to the shepherd with love and affection.

Maybe he'll tell 'em a story,
or read 'em a book,
or go to the fridge and get 'em some milk and a snack.

The shepherd cares for them.
He's charged with looking after these sheep—
of grooming and feeding and protecting them from all sorts of harm:
from wolves, disease, and simply getting lost.

The sheep have come to hear his voice, to recognize it—
even while he's still far off, they hear Him chatting with the door-keeper.
They know that wherever they hear the voice, there they'll find their Shepherd.

The sheepfold is the Holy, Christian, Church.
It's the faith, the community of believers.
It's the gathering of all the saints around the voice of the Shepherd and His gifts to them.
This is the place where you, O sheep, find your rest and security.
Where you're fed and nourished and promised a safe place to lay your head—
a place where you can let your guard down and confess your sins,
where you can admit your brokenness, your dysfunctional family, your
repeated lusts, your hatred and envy and addictions.
This is the place where you're not judged for doing those things,
but freed of them by the blood of Christ, your Shepherd.

But how is it that you got here?
How'd the *Church* become your sheepfold?
And how do you know that you're one of the sheep that's supposed to be here?

Well, did you come in through the front door,
or try to hop over the back fence?

And another question to ask is,
are there other sheep here who *haven't* come through the door?

Isn't it a bit exclusive, mean, condemning, and impolite to say you must come through the door?
Isn't this door simply a man-made law—
can't there be many doors and many ways and many religions?
And why do we even have a fence up in the first place?
Shouldn't we tear it down so as to be more loving, more free, more all-inclusive?

In our Gospel reading today Jesus says,
“**I AM the Door of the sheep**” (Jn 10:7,9).

That means, He's the entrance;
He's the way into the sheepfold, the way into peace and safety and salvation.
And what we'll hear next week, too,
He's the *only* way!

If you want to be in the sheepfold, and safely there, calling it your home,
then you must come in through the front door—
You must come in the way of Christ.

But as many of you are learning, no sheep comes in the sheepfold on its own.

The tendency of sheep is rather to wander off alone.
Sheep tend to do their own thing.
They like their freedom, they follow their whims and desires.
If the grace smells nice further on, that's where they go.

And so, without a shepherd, sheep tend to get lost.
They wander off into the dangerous world of wolves, poachers, and disease.
And they're not very bright on top of it all!
Unlike dogs, rarely will you hear of a sheep finding his own way home!

For the life of the sheep, there must be a shepherd.

And in today's reading, we find that there are both good shepherds and bad—
the shepherd also must enter the sheepfold by the Door—
He too must come through Christ.
The shepherd may change from time to time, but that's okay.

It's okay because you know the voice of the Shepherd,
not because of the sound or the eloquence or diction in which He speaks,
but by the *words* He uses.

And whenever you get a new shepherd, you learn to listen carefully,
making sure his voice is the voice of the Good Shepherd.

Shepherds are pastors, preachers, teachers of the Word.

If a pastor comes through the Door into the Sheepfold, you have nothing to fear—
you recognize His voice as the voice of truth.

But if a pastor tries to jump the back fence,
tries to come in secretly and lure you away—
tempting you to leave the sheepfold—
if a pastor tells you that there's a way into safety, peace, and joy any other way than the way of
Christ and Him crucified for you,
then you don't have a pastor, a shepherd of Christ.
Instead, you've got a thief, a killer, and a destroyer.

Don't listen to that sort of preacher.
Don't listen to the preaching of salvation by your own works.
If someone tells you there's a way to be saved other than the way of the cross,
then turn and run!

These sorts of preachers and teachers will come in from time to time.
They sneak in the back, trying to convince you that what Jesus did was fine and good,
but there's more to be done.
They say salvation is by Christ, sure, and even by Grace—
but you must earn it,
you must prove yourself worthy of it,
you must decide for yourself to follow.

That's the problem of the Pharisees.
Christ alone was too easy—it must also include following the Torah, keeping the Law.

So also today; any time you hear of a salvation, of a sheepfold, and peace,
that comes by Jesus plus anything else, then run!
It's *never* Jesus plus anything—
it's *always* Jesus alone. Full stop. Period!

He is the Door of the Sheep.
He, alone, is the entrance into the sheepfold, the Church, the faith.
He alone is the means of your salvation, the way of your safety and deliverance;
He alone is the door by which you come in and go out freely, finding safe pasture
and He only comes in the way of the Cross—of suffering death for you.

False preachers hate this sort of Jesus.
They hate the Jesus who excludes the other doors and ways.
They hate the Jesus who builds up walls and establishes a set parameter for the sheepfold.
They hate the Jesus who demands salvation *only* by Him and Him alone.
They hate the Jesus who takes salvation into His own hands, not letting you participate!

And so these false preachers, these false shepherds, are bent on turning you away from Christ.
 They'll try to empower you,
 to get you to trust yourself,
 thinking so highly of yourself that you no longer need to go in or out by the door.

But that's not the voice of Him who called you by name.
 That's not the voice of Him who washed you in Holy Baptism
 and who now promises His own body and blood for your forgiveness!

That Jesus is the Door comforts us immensely,
 because we know that we've been shepherded rightly through this door.

We too have died and risen with Christ in our Baptism.
 We too have received the fruit of the cross, the forgiveness of sins, and life everlasting.
 We too have heard the Gospel, the voice of the Shepherd,
 the word that gathered us from our wandering and led us safely into the fold.

And with Christ as the Door, we trust all those shepherds who come by Him.
 For they come with His approval, His sending, His word of the Gospel.

So don't be afraid.

You are sheep in the fold.
 You're here rightly by Holy Baptism.
 Not by what you've done,
 but by what the Lord has done for you—
 by shepherding you here in the way of the cross.

And while you're here,
 while you're in this Holy Christian Church, this sheepfold,
 rejoice!

For Christ, who is the Door, has said,
 "I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10).

The abundant life is marked by great joy—
 even in the face of great suffering—
 for the life promised to us is free of wolves, diseases, and dysfunctional families;
 it's a life without divorce or separation,
 without death or sadness.

The abundant life is a life that cannot die—
 a resurrected life, just like our Lord's.

Christ is risen!

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit