

## SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT 2025

If today weren't a Sunday, December 6 would be the feast of St. Nicholas. The first reading is about how the Messiah, the Christ, will shepherd His People. St. Nicholas, Bishop of Myra at the start of the 4th Century, was an outstanding shepherd for his people. So was St. Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, at the end of the 4th Century. St. Ambrose was such an outstanding bishop that the Emperor Theodosius the Great said of him that Ambrose was the only bishop he knew who perfectly lived up to that most demanding vocation.

It is no easy matter to be a shepherd of the Lord's flock as a bishop. There are many other shepherds of the Lord's flock, however, and none of them have an easy task. To be a priest is not easy. To be a father or mother is not easy. To be a teacher or employer is not easy. To be a policeman or soldier is not easy. To be a judge or prince is not easy. It is never easy to be a shepherd, since a shepherd has to be willing to die for his flock, and death, including the little death of daily inconvenience, is simply not attractive. We fear death, big and little, and only supernatural love can overcome that natural fear.

Three times the Risen Lord Jesus Christ asked St. Peter if he loved Him. The Lord Jesus asks every shepherd of His People that same question. Do you love Me? If, by His Grace, the little shepherd answers, "You know that I love You," the Great Shepherd gives the same command He gave to St. Peter, "Tend My sheep." As bishop or priest, as father or mother, as teacher or employer, as policeman or soldier, as judge or prince, feed My sheep.

Fear is a real thing, both daily fear and crisis fear, both fear of failure and fear of pain, both fear of misunderstanding and fear of harm. Only the One Who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life can give a Love that is stronger than Fear. By that gift, every Shepherd can vanquish every form of fear and do his duty. He has received Love from the Lord, and the task of Love is to feed the Lord's flock.

A shepherd who has not received the Good Shepherd's Love will treat the Lord's flock as though it were his own flock, for his personal satisfaction and profit. Thus, we do find the worldly bishop, the lazy priest, the abusive father, the neglectful mother, the tyrannical teacher, the nasty boss, the badge heavy cop, the bullying soldier, the dictatorial judge, and the luxurious prince. They are the way they are because they do not love the Lord, and, not loving Him, they cannot tend His flock.

Do you love Me? If you do, tend My sheep.

All of us shepherds, if we love the Lord, will tend His sheep. This means that we will focus on taking care of our sheep. We will devote some attention to caring of ourselves, but only so that we will have the strength, knowledge, and wisdom, to do our duty and care for the sheep. The sheep are His, not ours. The glory of taking good care of them must be His glory, not ours, since His Grace makes that glory possible.

The sheep are not our own. We are not to abuse them by domineering over them, nor are we to neglect them by failing to guide them. All of us shepherds have a lawful and even holy authority that is to be used, not abused. We abuse it when we fail to use it, and when we use it for our own advantage and satisfaction. God forbid that we should use for our own satisfaction those for whom the Great Shepherd shed His Precious Blood!

If we love Him, we shepherds under Him must love His sheep. That love overcomes the natural fear we have of death. Fear of death embraces the death of our mortal body, but it also embraces pain, humiliation, misunderstanding, rejection, and failure. All of these things we quite naturally dread. Only the strength of Jesus Christ's Love can overpower our natural dread of those ugly things. Our Love, Jesus Christ suffered many forms of death for our sake, ultimately the humiliating and physically painful destruction of His mortal Body on the Cross. By His Presence, we shepherds under Him can suffer various forms of death for His sheep.

As shepherds, there is a lot for us to be afraid of. Some time ago, a wise old Spaniard observed that a matador who goes into the arena claiming not to be afraid is either an idiot or not facing an actual bull. We shepherds of all sorts face all sorts of bulls. They are dangerous and facing them takes courage. St. Paul wrote to Timothy that, having fought the good fight, a merited crown of glory awaits him. There is a certain honor that is due to every good shepherd. I don't think we are grateful enough for saintly bishops, devoted priests, protecting fathers, nurturing mothers, dedicated teachers, kindly bosses, compassionate police, courageous soldiers, wise judges, and noble princes. Honor to them! The Lord will honor them on the Great Day, and we should honor them on this day. Every shepherd who, by God's Grace, has been like Sts. Nicholas and Ambrose in protecting, teaching, and guiding the flock entrusted to them by the Lord, deserves honor in this life and in the next.

With Christ's Cross before us, all of us who are shepherds under Christ, can give ourselves for the sheep as He did once in blood and suffering on the Cross, and now does in sign and sacrament upon the Altar. May the Shepherd, Who made Himself the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world, now wash away the sins of all of us here present, and lift all of us up together into His Eternal Glory.

Amen.