

SUNDAY WITHIN THE CHRISTMAS OCTAVE

ST THOMAS BECKET

(Jn 10:11-16) (Audio Year B Track 049)

(Poem Vol. 4, pp. 653-5, – Gospel Vol. 8, pp. 158-60);

(It is late in the third year of Jesus' public life. Jesus is talking to a growing crowd of people in a lane near one of Jerusalem's main roads. He asserts that He alone is the Door through which people may enter Heaven, whereas some people have chosen to follow false Messiahs and false shepherds...)

'The false shepherds did not speak sincere words, or perform comforting deeds. They dispersed and tortured the flock, or they abandoned it to wolves, or they killed it to make a profit - selling it to secure their lives. Or they deprived it of its pastures to turn them into places of pleasure or thickets for idols. Do you know which are the wolves? They are the evil passions: the vices that the same false shepherds taught the flock, as they were the first to practise them. And do you know which are the thickets for idols? They are one's selfishness - before which, too much incense is burnt.

It is logical that false shepherds should behave like this. They are nothing but thieves, who have come to steal, kill and destroy, to take the sheep to treacherous pastures or to false folds which are nothing but slaughter-houses. But those which come to Me are safe, and they will be able to go out to My pastures, or come back to rest with Me, and become strong and fat with holy healthy food. Because I have come for that. That My people - My sheep, so thin and depressed - may have life, and have it abundantly, in peace and joy. And I want that so much, that I have come to give My life. So that My sheep may have the full abundant Life of the children of God.

I am the good Shepherd. And when a shepherd is good, he gives his life to defend his flock from wolves and thieves. Whereas a mercenary - who does not love the sheep, but loves the money he gets for leading them to pasture - is only worried about saving himself, and the savings that he keeps in his bosom. And when he sees wolves or thieves come, he runs away. But he goes back later, to some sheep which are left half dead by the wolves, or dispersed by the thieves. He kills the former to eat them, or sells the latter to make more money. And then with false tears, he tells his master that not even one sheep was spared.

What does the mercenary care if a wolf tears into and disperses the sheep, and a thief plunders them to take them to the butcher? Did he watch over them while they were growing? Did he work to make them strong? The owner knows how much sheep cost, and how many hours of work, and of watching. He knows how many sacrifices, he loves them, and he takes care of them, because they are dear to him.

But I am more than the owner. I am the Saviour of My flock. I know how much the salvation of even one soul costs Me. I am therefore willing to do anything to save a

soul. It was entrusted to Me by My Father. All the souls have been entrusted to Me, with instructions that I should save a very large number of them. The more I will be able to snatch from the death of the spirit, the more will My Father be glorified. I therefore struggle to free them from all their enemies - that is from their egos, from the world, from the flesh, from the demon - and from My enemies, who fight Me for them, to grieve Me. I do that, because I know the Thought of My Father. And My Father sent Me to do that, because He is aware of My love for Him, and for souls.

The sheep of My flock know Me and My love, and they feel that I am ready to give My life to give them happiness.

I have other sheep. But they do not belong to this Fold. Therefore, they do not know Me for what I am - many do not know what I am and who I am. To many of us, they are sheep that appear to be worse than wild billy-goats. They are considered unworthy of knowing the Truth, and of having Life and the Kingdom. And yet it is not so. The Father wants them as well, so I must approach them too: to make Myself known, to make the Good News known, to lead them to My pastures, and to gather them. They also will listen to My voice, and they will end up by loving it. And there will be only one Fold under only one Shepherd, and the Kingdom of God will be formed on the Earth, ready to be transported to - and received - in Heaven: under My sceptre, My sign, and My true Name.

My true Name! It is known only to Me! But when the number of the chosen ones is complete, and among hymns of jubilation they sit at the great wedding feast of the Bridegroom and the Bride, then My Name will be made known to My chosen ones. Through their loyalty to it, they have become holy, without knowing the full extent and the depth of what it means: to be marked with My Name, to be rewarded because of their love for it, or to know what the reward will be... This is what I want to give to My faithful sheep. And it is My own joy...'

With His eyes bright with ecstatic tears, Jesus looks at the faces turned towards Him, and a smile trembles on His lips. It is such a spiritualised smile in His spiritualised face, that it thrills the crowds who realise that the Christ has been in a beatific rapture and that out of love He wishes to see it accomplished. He collects Himself, and for a moment He closes His eyes - concealing the mystery that His mind sees, and that the eyes might reveal - and He resumes:

'That is why the Father loves Me, Oh My people, Oh My flock! Because for your sake, for your eternal good, I give My life. Later I will retake it. But first I will give it, that you may have life, and your Saviour as your life. And I will give it in such a way, that you may feed on it. Because I will change from Shepherd into pasture and fountain, which give food and drink: not for forty years as for the Hebrews in the desert, but for all the time of exile in the deserts of the Earth.

No one, actually, takes My life. Neither those who love Me with their whole beings and deserve that I should sacrifice it for them, nor those who take it through immense

hatred and foolish fear. No one could take it if I did not agree to give it, and if the Father did not allow it. Besause we are both enraptured by an ecstasy of love for the guilty Mankind. I will give it Myself. And I have the power to retake it whenever I wish, as it is not befitting that Death should prevail over Life. That is why the Father gave Me that power, nay, the Father ordered Me to do that. And through My life - offered and consumed - the people will become one only People: Mine, the heavenly People of the children of God. And in the people, the sheep will be separated from the billy-goats, and the sheep will follow their Shepherd to the Kingdom of eternal Life.'