

## “The Good Shepherd Lays Down His Life for the Sheep”

John 10:11-18

Christ is risen!! He is risen indeed!! Alleluia!!

I am puzzled each time that I hear someone boldly announce what the central theme of the Christian message is, and they don't say anything about Christ's blood being poured out as the ransom price for the sin of the world or the resurrection of the body being that central theme. In our first reading from Acts chapter 4, Peter certainly sees Christ's death and resurrection as the only thing which matters. And we are told that the Sadducees were “greatly annoyed” because the disciples were “proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead.”

When Jesus Christ entered into this world as the babe in Bethlehem, His gruesome suffering and death at the hands of the Jews and Romans was not just part of the plan – it was the focal point of the plan. Jesus never intended not to die on the cross. It was the only way that He could right the wrongs of the past. Blood is a special substance. It is the only way for sins to be washed clean.

On Palm Sunday and Maundy Thursday, I offered these words during the Proper Preface of the communion liturgy: “Jesus Christ, our Lord, who accomplished the salvation of mankind by the tree of the cross that, where death arose, there life also might rise again and that the serpent who overcame by the tree of the garden might likewise by the tree of the cross be overcome.”

Satan conquered mankind through the deception at the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the Garden of Eden. Christ conquered Satan by the tree of the cross.

Satan stole the innocence of Adam and Eve with His lies. Christ restored the innocence of Adam, Eve, and all their children through the truth of the Gospel, that is, the Good News that the sin of our forefathers and every act contrary to God's commands that has occurred since, has been wiped clean, scoured away by the blood of Christ given and shed for you for the remission of sins.

Blood is a special substance. And not only did Christ have it pour out from His hands, feet, and side from the wounds on the cross, and from His back where He was repeatedly whipped by the soldiers, and from His brow where the crown of thorns was put on His head and beaten into His skull with a stick.

Not only did He pour out that blood for us, but He did it willingly. No one took His life from Him, but He laid it down of His own accord. The four Gospels tell us that the chief priests and Pharisees repeatedly tried to capture or kill Jesus during His ministry, but we read again and again that such things did not happen on those occasions because "it was not His time."

It was not the ingenious plot of the high priest to have one of the disciples betray Jesus that caused Jesus to be arrested. He was arrested, beaten, humiliated, and crucified because Jesus chose to suffer this agony for us. He repeatedly tells His disciples what is going to happen to Him when He gets to Jerusalem. And the Father loves Him for this, and St. Paul tells us in his letter to the Philippians that for this reason, the Father

has exalted the name of Jesus to be above every name – that at the name of Jesus Christ every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Even before Jesus was born, the people of the world were privileged to hear God's plan of salvation. Isaiah the prophet wrote: "it was the Lord's will to crush Him and cause Him to suffer, and...the Lord makes His life a guilt offering" [Is. 53:10].

It was certainly not pleasing for the Father to send His only-begotten Son to suffer this gruesome, humiliating death. However, that blood, that special substance had to be shed.

That is the nature of God. Scripture says that "God is love." What is love if it is not unselfish? How can Jesus be a good shepherd, or The Good Shepherd if He does not lay down His life for the sheep?"

Through His death on the cross, not only has Jesus paid the final ransom price for the sins of the world, but He has demonstrated the greatest example of love and selflessness. No one forced Him to do what He did. He did it of His own accord. He did it out of love for the will of His Father, and He did it out of love for us.

He did it because none of us could. Our blood may be what keeps us going in this life, and therefore we may think of it as a special substance, but our blood, being tainted with sin, cannot wash away sin. It took the innocent blood of the Son of God to do that. And He shed that blood and willingly laid down His life for us. He truly is our Good Shepherd. Amen. Christ is risen!! He is risen indeed!! Alleluia!!

The peace of God which surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.