

First Epistle of the apostle St. Peter chapter 5,1-4: *To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them-- not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.*

We're now in week 3 after Easter. Last Sunday was called *Misericordias Domini*: "*Misericordia Domini plena est terra ...*" ("The land is filled with the mercy of the Lord") from Psalm 33 (32). The gospel for this Sunday from St. John gives us the theme of "Good Shepherd" and that's where this admonition of St. Peter to the shepherds of God's flock fits in.

There was a time, when Jesus asked his disciples: Do you want to go away too? St. Peter had answered: "Where should we go? You have words of eternal life!"¹ Where are you going?²

Do you remember how our Lord and saviour IX – himself the truly good Shepherd – encouraged Peter on the night, when he was betrayed: "I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." (Luk 22:32). That was the goodness of the good shepherd who helped him turn around. Jesus pulled Peter from drowning in the the stormy waves etc. St. Peter repented after his denial. He had walked out on Jesus, but he was called back to repentance. Was turned around by the grace, mercy and good favour of our Lord, who as he was giving the good confession looked out to Peter in the courtyard was he was betraying him 3x. Thus he pulled Peter towards himself after he had fallen, forgiving him and installed him into the wonderful office of shepherd (pastor) and minister (servant) of souls: "Feed my sheep!" Strengthen your brothers, stabilize the stumbling, support the weak, raise the fallen. Be a good bishop to those under your care. That's your place. That's your calling!

That very night after our Lord had instituted his last supper, and given his new testament, the disciples started to quarrel about who was the greatest amongst them.³ This was after their Lord and master had put on that apron, gotten down onto his knees and bowed low before them like a slave and washed their feet. The master washing the feet of his disciples, the teacher his students. Afterwards he explained this to them.⁴ This underlined his announcement earlier on in his ministry: "I have not come to be served, but to serve!"⁵ What that means, was shown to them that night. IX proved it in word and deed. St. Peter was there. He got the explanation from IX and now he hands that down to his brethren: *Serve willingly, don't be lording it over those entrusted to you.*⁶

St. Peter witnessed more. Remember Judas Iscariot the thief, that two faced crook and lover of money. He was one of the disciples – one of the 12 – the inner circle. It was he who complained against Mary's anointing Jesus in Bethany: "*Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?*" Now don't get this

¹ Cf Joh 6:68-72

² **Quo vadis?**

³ "*A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. And he said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves. "You are those who have stayed with me in my trials, and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel."* (Luk 22:24-30 ESV)

⁴ Lk.22,25-27.

⁵ St. John remembers this very crucial and pivotal night in history too. He recalls what happened: "*When he (Jesus) had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them."* (Joh 13:12-17 ESV)

⁶ He does that in Acts 10-11 eg Cornelius/Caserea whilst praying in Joppa.

wrong. He was not a champion of the poor. He didn't care for the poor, but "he was a thief, and being in charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it." (Joh.12:6) So he was always willing to make a quick buck and didn't mind cutting corners, going over the red line either. No, at the end he even made plans to betray Jesus for only 30 pieces of silver. At the time, he must have been quite proud of himself. This was easy money. Just one kiss and a betraying "Greetings Rabbi!" (Mt.26:49). Yet it was blood money. (cf. Mt.27:6) And it's like Lady Macbeth realizes after killing that royal Duncan: Blood doesn't just evaporate. You don't just wash it off.⁷ "Macbeth had said that even the ocean couldn't wash his hands clean of Duncan's and his children's blood; Lady Macbeth, who scorned him first, now finds the blood dyed into her conscience."⁸ Judas gets a taste of this alarming guilty conscience too. He's terrified by rustling leaves, blowing wind and fleeting shadows. In the end he hangs himself. The money he had always coveted, left him empty, deserted and worthless, despondent and condemned. He threw it away into the temple.⁹ It's nothing. It disappoints. It puts to shame. Leaves us at a terrible loss. St. Peter writes to his brothers: Serve willingly, volunteer and do it for Christ's sake (Remember his service) and not because you pursue dishonest gain. St. Paul summarizes to the Corinthians: *"For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ."* (2Co 2:17) Be careful. Those that want to become rich fall into all sorts of traps and vices.¹⁰ Therefore watch out for this temptation and snare. Just look how easy the mighty in politics, sports and business fall, because of corruption and fraud. Even bishops and cardinals are not immune against its alluring enticement. Pastors in mega-churches, but also in small rural places fall victim to this. Therefore don't pursue dishonest gain! What's your price: 30 or 40 pieces of silver?

Jesus Christ is the Good Shepherd to the flock. He is the perfect example and the all availing, sufficient and efficient sacrifice. He alone is the propitiation of all our sins. He calls us to follow in his footsteps: Take up your cross and follow me! St. Peter admonishes his brethren to be good examples of the flock. You are to be holy as I am holy, say's the one Lord and triune God. Sanctify yourselves. Put off, what hinders and burdens and weighs you down and live as faithful people of the living God. Deeds preach loud and clear. Action is often much louder and clearer than any words spoken. So be careful what you do and how you act. As disciples and followers of Christ, as Christians and pastors You are after all light and salt of the world. Remember this is not a useless endeavor, but rather it is the very purpose of your life, to live every day as baptized people of God in righteousness and holiness as is pleasing to him, for that's what he created, saved and sanctified you for. That is your life, your calling, your mission and purpose in life. *Quo vadis?* Story of the film. Where are you going?

The Chief Shepherd – the truly good Shepherd and bishop of our souls – will appear again soon. Then he will give you the crown of glory, that will never pass away. For he is gracious, kind and forgiving. Praise, thanks & glory to him now + forever. Amen.

The Peace of the Lord be with you +

Hymn 646

⁷ "Doctor: What is it she does now? Look how she rubs her hands. Gentlewoman: It is an accustom'd action with her, to seem thus washing her hands. I have known her continue in this a quarter of an hour. Lady Macbeth: Yet here's a spot. Doctor: Hark, she speaks. I will set down what comes from her, to satisfy my remembrance the more strongly. Lady Macbeth: **Out, damn'd spot! out, I say!**—One; two: why, then 'tis time to do't.—Hell is murky.—Fie, my lord, fie, a soldier, and afeard? What need we fear who knows it, when none can call our pow'r to accompt?—Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?" (Macbeth Act 5, scene 1, 26–40)

⁸ <http://www.enotes.com/shakespeare-quotes/damned-spot>

⁹ Another story to prove that point is the tragic one of King Midas with the golden touch, where even his daughter turns to gold.

¹⁰ "But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction." (1Ti 6:9 ESV)