

3rd Sunday after Pentecost (the 99 left behind)

“What man of you that hath an hundred sheep: and if he shall lose one of them, doth he not leave the ninety-nine in the desert, and go after that which was lost, until he find it?”

1. Have you ever wondered what the ninety-nine sheep went through while their Shepherd was away seeking that one lost sheep? How did they get along without the Shepherd around? What were they supposed to be doing while He was away? Throughout salvation history, there have been many times when it seems that Our Lord, the Good Shepherd, the Shepherd of shepherds, went away for a spell. Many of the saints relate how they had to go through periods of darkness... times in the desert... when they felt spiritually dry and alone. Job in anguish said: “I cry to thee, and thou hearest me not: I stand up, and thou dost not regard me” (Job 30:20). St. John of the Cross asks the Lord in the Spiritual Canticle, “Where have you hidden?”
2. The Fathers of Church come to our aid in answering these questions because they speak of the 99 sheep as being the angels left behind in heaven while the Son of God descended to earth to save the fallen race of Adam, the one lost sheep. The holy angels enjoy the vision of God in heaven, they possess Him. The number 99 indicates the great variety of angels... making up the 9 choirs (see the two sets of 9 bells in the Angelus as a sign of this). Purely spiritual beings, each angel is a species unto itself...whereas man is one single species... thus, the parable speaks of the ninety-nine as compared to the one lost sheep, who is Adam.
3. Bd. Francis Palau taught that the number of angels is great beyond reckoning: “God has created intellects which are purely spiritual, much more sublime than man, these are the angels *whose number exceed the grains of the sand in the seashores, to the stars of heaven, and the leaves of the trees and of grasses that have existed, exist and will exist on earth*” (*The Solitary Life*, no. 4). Incomprehensible! What is more, each angel reflects some unique splendor of God, making the spiritual world much richer in variety than the material world. O how wonderful is the Lord Our God... incomprehensible... infinite in beauty and loveliness.
4. Of importance to our reflection today is this simple truth. When the angels choose something, they are fixed in that choice. They do not change their minds nor can they. Being purely spiritual, when they make

a decision, it is done... it is fixed... it is over. Think of it like this. Angels travel at the speed of thought (why we depict them as having wings). If they want to go to Rome, they simply think of Rome and they are there. For us, to go to Rome is a long drawn out affair. Thus, we have time to change our minds about this destination as we go along. We can choose to go someplace else or just remain home. This is due, in part, to the presence of our bodies. As long as we are in the body, therefore, we can change our minds. We can change our choice of destination.

5. Yet, the Church encourages us to make decisions as if we were angels... She wants us to fix our minds on our end as if we were already there, because once our bodies die and our souls leave them, the choice we have made is fixed forever. We become like the angels or, sad to say, like the demons... unable to change our eternal destination. Good for some, bad for others.
6. This is why the Church has us make vows at the beginning of our journey... so that we will remain faithful unto the end... until death. These are our baptismal vows. Some are encouraged to add onto them vows of religion or marriage vows ...all dedicated to keeping us on the right track... and they are supposed to be unto the end! Unto death...
7. So, when we are baptized, we are, as it were, counted among the angels... we possess God in grace... which promises eternal life. The baptized are supposed to be committed Catholics... set in their ways... unflinching in the preservation of the indwelling of God in grace and revealed truth. Death before heresy! death before apostasy! Death before sin!
8. In this way, we see how we can be numbered among the 99. And we know there are times when Our Lord seems to leave the 99 "in the desert" as He seeks a poor lost soul or even a whole lost people or nation. *"I am the good shepherd; ... I lay down my life for My sheep. And other sheep I have, that are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice, and there shall be one fold and one shepherd"* (Jn 10:14-16). Again, we ask, how do these chosen 99 sheep get along without the Shepherd around? What are they supposed to be doing while He is away?
9. Divine Revelation tells us something about some who were among the 99 seemingly left behind (we have mentioned Job). When Moses, the

Shepherd of Israel, went up the Mountain to receive the Law of God, the people below were left "in the desert." After a spell, they began to wonder what had become of Moses. Giving into their foolish impatience, they soon made a golden calf for themselves, set up a false liturgy of sorts and then "sat down to eat and drink, [after which] they rose up to play" (Exodus 32:6). Hmmm. Sound familiar?

10. In the parable of the faithful and unfaithful servants... the Lord seemed to be delayed in returning. As a result many were weary, thinking, "My lord is long a coming" and they began "to strike the menservants and maidservants, and to eat and drink and be drunk" (Luke 12:45). Hmmm.
11. When Our Lord fell asleep in the boat, the disciples lost their confidence and courage... panicking in the storm. They thought all was over and lost. When Our Lord walked a little ahead of them on His way up to Jerusalem, they argued among themselves as to who was greatest. When He pulled away from them to pray on the mountain, they thought He was a ghost when He came to them on the water. When He again withdrew a mere stones throw away from them after the Last Supper to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane, they fell asleep. And perhaps what is most significant, when He pulled away from them in the Passion... in order to redeem the lost sheep of mankind, as we well know, they denied Him... and fled...even after promising to suffer with Him unto death! Hmmm.
12. There are some very important lessons here. As the baptized, we are of the 99. We are supposed to be committed Catholics... like the angels, willing to keep our vows to the very end. Oh how important it is to be meditating frequently on our end... death, judgment, heaven and hell... all in order to keep this end alive, real, clear and present in our minds and hearts... in order to be like the angels... placing ourselves at the end for each act of the will (asking what is this to eternity?). How important it is to be renewing our baptismal vows daily by making the sign of the Cross using Holy Water... and to take advantage of the Pledge of Eternal Life, the Holy Eucharist, in the Mass and adoration.
13. But, as we just heard, humans are not too good at imitating the angels. Would that we were!!! When the Shepherd pulls away, even a little... we easily end up eating and drinking out of due order, getting in all sorts of fights, struggling to get ahead of others in order to be counted

first... giving way to fear and despair... and even outright denials of the Lord and His Holy Catholic Church. We make golden calves for ourselves... and behave like beasts. Truth be told, we do not like being left behind in the desert! We want to see and feel God's presence in us and around us (especially in our bodies). O how few are willing to live by faith, hope and charity (in their souls)!!!

14. What is more, we know there is something very troubling going on at this time. For those with eyes to see, as we have spoken of many times, the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, is going the way of Her Lord. She is on Her way to Calvary. The human race has once again become the LOST SHEEP and the Lord is going to Calvary to lay down His life to save it, but this time, it is going to be done in and through His Church. He, the Head of the Body, along with His most lovely Neck, the Blessed Virgin Mary, filled the chalice already on that Friday we call GOOD... it is now time for the Church to do the same. She has been filling it all these Centuries...but it must be filled to overflowing!!! The Lost Sheep of our day are not cheap to recover!
15. Perhaps we could be more specific. Our Lady has promised that if Russia is consecrated to Her Immaculate Heart, this very same Russia... this long lost sheep of the Roman Catholic Church, will return with wonderful effects ensuing... causing the rejoicing of all the angels...in heaven and of those on earth. Thus, Our Lord is once again going to Calvary for the lost sheep... waiting to reclaim what is HIS by right ... meanwhile we are seemingly left alone. We are the 99 left behind in the desert!!!
16. If this be true, it must be somehow mysteriously good for all involved... if only the 99 would open their hearts to it. In other words, not only does the Shepherd get the lost sheep back... (Russia will come back to the fold as prophesied) but also the rest of the Church is purified and made ready for the heavenly pastures. He pulls away so that our golden calves may be discovered and destroyed... so the faithful 99 can leave the desert behind and enter the Promised Land.
17. Perhaps you are feeling what it means to be counted among the 99! I know I am... Tempted to eat and drink out of due proportion? Tempted to despair and think God has given up on you and your family or loved ones (recall Job and St. John)? Perhaps you are tempted to think the King is

just a ghost... a phantom... a made up Shepherd and religion. Some prefer to just take it easy... Others are getting in fights, dividing families... as well as friends by their foolish and sinful choices, behaving like beasts. Some act like the Deists who claim that God's universe is like a watch... He wound it up and then withdrew to leave it to itself.

18. So, we must answer the question as to what are the 99 supposed to be doing while He is away? In a word, the 99 are to be MERITING the conversion of sinners... of Russia. At Fatima Our Lady said that many souls are lost because they have no one to pray and suffer for them. God made things such that we cannot save ourselves... WE cannot baptize ourselves, not even the priest can give himself absolution... We are saved in a flock... in a family... in the company of saints, the Church. Recall the friends carrying the paralytic to His Majesty... it was THEIR faith that saved the man. St. Teresa of Jesus liked to say: "In the company of saints we become saints." Thus, the return of the Lost Sheep has some connection with the 99 remaining faithful back at home... This is why these same angels rejoice when the lost sheep is finally saved. This means the 99 need to stop being selfish and do their part... the sooner they fulfill it, the sooner the Lord will return with the Lost Sheep and we can all rejoice!!
19. And so, in order to prepare for this difficult moment, the Good Shepherd gave us ways to pray... ways to do our part... ways to merit. Our Lord and His Blessed Mother gave us the 1st Friday and 1st Saturday devotions. We enthrone the Sacred Heart in our homes, we pray the Rosary everyday...consecrate ourselves to the Immaculate Heart, and so on. Furthermore, Our Lord said the 99 remained in the desert ... indicating they were to be making sacrifices by not eating and drinking and sleeping all we want.
20. What is more, let us not forget how God gave each us an angel in order to become like them... to will as they have willed... unto the end. Who can forget how effectively and wonderfully the Angel of Portugal assisted the children of Fatima to live in the desert with great success. Let us not neglect this precious angelic friend and helper but pray to him daily.
21. Listen to a Carmelite Blessed (Elizabeth of the Trinity) talk to the Good Shepherd about how to be one of the 99 sheep that is left behind: "I

accept in advance every sacrifice, every trial, even that of no longer feeling Thee with me. I only ask one thing: always to be generous and faithful, always; I never want to take it back. I want to do Thy will perfectly, to respond always to Thy grace..." (*He is My Heaven*, p. 47).

22. The Lord, the Good Shepherd, has now, as it were, pulled away in His Body the Church in order to ascend the heights of Golgotha once again. She is in Her Passion... doing what is required to usher in the age of peace, the Triumph of Mary's Immaculate Heart that has been promised to come...with the consecration and conversion of Russia. And as the 99 left behind we are feeling it!!! We can see with more and more clarity our golden calves... We must do what has been asked of us or we will surely be among those who sleep in the garden and then deny the Church in Her time of trial? When Good Shepherd comes back... may we be among those who hear Him say, "Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep." And then there will be one flock and one shepherd.