

## A reading from the homilies of St. Gregory the Great

*Christ the good shepherd*

“I am the good shepherd. And I know my sheep” (that is, I love them) “and my sheep know me.” It is as if he said plainly: “Those who love me, obey me.” For those who do not love the truth do not yet know it.

My dear brethren, now that you have heard of the test I must undergo, consider how these words of the Lord imply a test of your own. Ask yourselves if you are his sheep, if you know him, if you recognize the light of truth. What I mean is that you recognize it not simply by faith but by love, I mean, you recognize it not just by belief but by action. For John the apostle, whose words we have been discussing, also said: “He who says he know God but disobeys his commandments is a liar.”

Consequently, in the passage we were originally considering, the Lord at once adds: “...as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.” It is as if he said straight out: “The proof that I know the Father and the Father knows me is the fact that I lay down my life for my sheep; that is to say, the love which leads me to die for my sheep shows how much I love the Father.”

He goes on to add the following words concerning the sheep: “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me, and I give them eternal life.” A little earlier he said also: “If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.” That is to say, he will go in to faith, and go out from faith to vision, from belief to contemplation, and he will find pasture at the everlasting feast.

So the sheep find the Lord's pastures; for anyone who follows him with an undivided heart is nourished in a pasture which is forever green. What are the pastures of these sheep if they are not the deepest joys of the everlasting fresh pastures of paradise? For the pasture of the saints is to see God face to face; when the vision of God never fails, the soul receives its fill of the food of life for ever.

And so, dear brethren, let us seek these pastures and there join in the joy and the celebrations of so many citizens of heaven. Let their happiness and rejoicing be an invitation to us. Let our hearts grow warm, brethren, let our faith be rekindled, let our desires for heavenly things grow warm; for to love like this is to be on the way.

No misfortune should distract us from this happiness and deep joy; for if anyone is anxious to reach a destination, the roughness of the road will not make him change his mind. The charms of prosperity must not lead us astray; for only a foolish traveller, when he sees pleasant fields on his way, forgets to go on towards his destination.