



Dear Friends,

Jesus is the good shepherd. He knows his own—by which he means, He loves them—and his own know him. In plain words: those who love Jesus are willing to follow him, for anyone who does not love the truth has not yet come to know it (John 10:14-16).

My dear brethren, you have heard the test we pastors have to undergo. Turn now to consider how these words of our Lord imply a test for yourselves also. Ask yourselves whether you belong to his flock, whether you know him, whether the light of his truth shines in your minds. I assure you that it is not by faith that you will come to know him, but by love, not by mere conviction, but by action. John the evangelist is my authority for this statement. He tells us that *anyone who claims to know God without keeping his commandments is a liar* (1 John 2:4).

Consequently, the Lord immediately adds: *As the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for my sheep* (John 10:15). Clearly, he means that laying down his life for his sheep gives evidence of his knowledge of the Father and the Father's knowledge of him. In other words, by the love with which he dies for his sheep he shows how greatly he loves his Father.

Again he says: *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them; they follow me, and I give them eternal life*. Shortly before this he had declared: *If anyone enters the sheepfold through me, he shall be saved; he shall go freely in and out and shall find good pasture*. He will enter a life of faith; from faith he will go out to vision, from belief to contemplation, and will graze in the good pastures of everlasting life.

So our Lord's sheep will finally reach their grazing ground where all who follow him in simplicity of heart will feed on the green pastures of eternity. These pastures are the spiritual joys of heaven. There is the elect look upon the face of God with unclouded vision and feast at the banquet of life for ever more.

Beloved brothers, let us set out for these pastures where we shall keep joyful festival with so many of our fellow citizens. May the thought of their happiness urge us on! Let us stir up our hearts, rekindle our faith, and long eagerly for what heaven has in store for us. To love thus is to be already on our way. No matter what obstacles we encounter, we must not allow them to turn us aside from the joy of that heavenly feast. Anyone who is determined to reach his destination is not deterred by the roughness of the road that leads to it. Nor must we allow the charm of success to seduce us, or we shall be like a foolish traveler who is so distracted by the pleasant meadows through which he is passing that he forgets where he is going.

Christ, our Passover, is the Good Shepherd who laid down his life for his sheep and has risen from the dead. For the sake of the flock, he willingly suffered death.

From a homily on the Gospels by Saint Gregory the Great, pope