

- During the Easter Season, our Mass readings often remind us of the incredible gift of salvation we have received through Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection, while calling us to live in a manner consistent with this great gift.
- So, for example, our 2nd reading from John's 1st epistle tells us how blessed we are to be God's children, while our 1st reading from the Book of Acts reminds us that we can only find salvation in Jesus' name, and therefore we must choose for Him and His Church.
- Indeed, in our Gospel we are called to listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd, Who lovingly calls His sheep to Himself – which is a way of telling us that we must be obedient to Christ and all that He teaches us through His Church.
- In short, our lives as Christians must be rooted in a humble obedience, doing all that we can to avoid sin, while striving to grow in virtue, so that we might become more like Christ.
- Sadly, so many of us today do not take sin seriously. As St. John Vianney once said, "we play with sin." This is because we simply don't realize how terrible and how offensive to our Lord even the smallest venial sin is.
- And so many of us carelessly commit sins, excusing ourselves because we think they don't really matter much. But my brothers and sisters, this is so terribly dangerous, for willfully giving in to sin – even venial ones – makes us playthings of the devil.
- When we sin, even venially, we set ourselves against our Lord. Yet, if we wish to be saved, then we must remain with Him by remaining within the safe pastures of His Body, the Church.
- For to be a Christian, to be a follower of Christ, we must be united to His one, holy, Catholic, and apostolic Church. This is why St. Peter states in our 1st reading that we must choose for Christ, who is the stone rejected by the builders.
- So, we must entrust ourselves to this Good Shepherd, following Him just as sheep follow the voice of their shepherd, for our salvation is only found in being one of the sheep of His flock.
- We become one of the Lord's sheep through our baptism. But after baptism we must continue choosing to be a member of His flock by humbly obeying Him and the teachings of His Catholic Church, which is the instrument through which God saves mankind.
- Unfortunately, there are many wolves in the world today that would lead us sheep astray from the true and fertile pastures of Holy Mother Church.
- Not only are there false religions and ideologies that pervert, distort, or obscure the teachings of God's one true Church, but there is the ever-present problem of rampant materialism that tells us that happiness is only found in the consumption of created things.
- There is also that selfish pride that tempts us to believe we can decide for ourselves what is right and wrong, that we can create our own truth by which to live. Of course, this is a lie.
- But worst of all, we're living in a time when some of the appointed shepherds of Christ's own Church are not good shepherds, but wolves in sheep's clothing, intentionally skewing and distorting the authentic moral teachings of the Church.
- So, what are we to do if we cannot trust all of our shepherds?
- First, it's imperative that we know our Faith, that we be well catechized, so that we can spot error when we hear it, and refute it when we need to.
- It's also imperative that we have a well-cultivated life of prayer, for it's our prayer that strengthens our relationship with Christ and binds us all the more tightly to Him, and it is our prayer that helps us grow in virtue.

- But even more than that, we must double-down on our choice for Christ and His Church. When we see the corruption and lack of integrity in our leaders, we may be tempted to walk away from the Church in disgust. But that's not the right answer, nor is it a safe route to take.
- For there is no salvation outside of the Church. There is no salvation outside of Christ. And so our choice for or against Jesus Christ and His Church is the most fundamental choice each of us has to make in this life, and herein lays the mystery of human freedom.
- God created us to love Him, yet there is no true love without the freedom to choose. Thus, our Lord gave us this capacity to choose. What we must understand is that this capacity to choose for or against God is nothing less than the capacity to determine our eternal destiny.
- Truly, we choose heaven or hell by how well we conform ourselves to Christ in this life, by how faithful we remain to His Church. The mystery of human freedom is that anyone would ever choose hell over heaven. But some do!
- But let us be clear about one very important point: the choice for heaven or hell is not a one-time event in our life. We make this choice so very gradually by every moral decision we make – even the small ones.
- Indeed, Heaven is won or lost not so much in the big decisions of life, but rather in the little day-to-day decisions we make. Every act of the will by which we seek to follow our Lord and His Church is a step toward Heaven.
- Conversely every sin, no matter how big or small, every act of defiance against our Lord, and every act of disobedience to the teachings of the Church He founded, is a step away from our Lord and heaven, and a step toward hell.
- Of course, in making our daily decisions to sin or not sin, we must fight our passions, our prejudices, and our pride. We must fight against the spirit of this world, which constantly encourages us to rebel against the ways of God and to devote ourselves more fully to the false consolations of mammon. At times we must even fight the devil himself.
- But our good Lord does not leave us alone in this fight! He is our good shepherd, and He lays down His life for His sheep. Not only has He given us the authentic teachings of the Church to guide us as we make decisions, but He also gives us the grace of the sacraments, which strengthen us and conform us ever more closely to Him.
- And when we fail, He gives us His mercy through the Sacrament of Reconciliation – no matter how serious our sins may be. Truly, if you make it a habit to go to confession regularly, you will be saved! But if you don't use this sacrament, your chances for salvation are iffy.
- While our Lord desires us to be perfect, living a perfect life here on earth is not a requirement for salvation. But loving our Lord by being humbly obedient *is*. Being contrite for our sins and confessing our sins *is*.
- Just as the chief priests and elders of the Jewish people rejected Him 2000 years ago, our Lord continues to be rejected today – even by some of His own shepherds. But we know that despite these rejections, Jesus is the Good Shepherd Who alone leads us to eternal life.
- And being one of His sheep is a choice we make every day, most especially in the little decisions to either sin or not sin; to follow His will or turn away from it.
- So, brothers and sisters, let us choose to be one of the Lord's sheep by always choosing to be faithful children of Holy Mother Church, even when her shepherds are not faithful.
- Let us each strive to avoid even the smallest of sins so that we may always be pleasing to Him in every way.