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The Green Pastures of Heaven

St. Gregory the Great - Father of the Early Church



I am the good shepherd. I know my own - by which I mean, I love them - and my own know me. In plain words: those who love me are willing to follow me, for anyone who does not love the truth has not yet come to know it.

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.*

Consequently, the Lord immediately adds: *As the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for my sheep.* 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 into 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 the elect look upon the face of God with unclouded vision and feast at the banquet of life for ever more.

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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 traveller who is so distracted by the pleasant meadows through which he is passing that he forgets where he is going.

This is used in the Roman Church's Office of Readings for the Fourth Sunday in Easter. It is taken from a homily of Saint Gregory the Great (Hom 14, 3-6: PL 76, 1129-1130). Pope Gregory I, commonly known as Gregory the Great, was one of the most fascinating of early Church leaders. Son of a Roman Senator, Gregory became Prefect (mayor) of the city of Rome, but then gave away his wealth to the poor and entered a monastery, became abbot, then finally Pope. His abundant writings are more practical and spiritual than doctrinal or theoretical. Gregory the Great, who died in 604 AD, is known as one of the four greatest Latin-speaking Fathers and Doctors of the Church.



The Fathers of the Church - Who They Are and Why They Matter

In a single, upbeat talk, full of examples and quick snapshots of some of the Church's most intriguing personalities, Marcellino D'Ambrosio explains who people are talking about when they refer to the "Fathers of the Church" or "Early Church Fathers." Though the ranks of the fathers include a tremendous variety of cultures, locales, and personalities, there is surprising consensus that emerges from them on a variety of the most important questions of our day. In this talk, Marcellino makes clear just how much these figures have to teach us today.

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