

THE BULLETIN

“So the faith was planted: so it must be restored.”

Eight Pond Place, Oyster Bay, NY 11771

April 2023

“I am the Good Shepherd...”

Adapted from a sermon by The Most Rev. Clarence Kelly
Copyright © 1993 The Most Rev. Clarence Kelly

From the earliest days of the Old Testament even to the coming of Christ, the words *sheep* and *shepherd* were used as expressions of God's relationship to men. In the eighth century before Christ, the prophet Isaias spoke of God as a shepherd who, "... in his arms ... gathers the lambs." (Isaias 40:11) The lambs spoken of are His chosen ones. Again Isaias says, "Like a shepherd he feeds his flock." (Ibid.) King David says, "... His people He led forth like sheep and guided them like a herd in the desert." (Ps. 77:52) He also calls God the "Shepherd of Israel." (Psalm 79) Of course, there is the beautiful twenty-second Psalm which begins: "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want."

In biblical times sheep were a principal livestock, but they were more than just livestock. They were used for food, for religious worship, and they were even used to judge a man's financial condition. The number of sheep a man owned was the measure of his wealth. Thus, the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob owned a tremendous number of sheep. King Solomon sacrificed 120,000 sheep on the occasion of the dedication of the Temple he built. His family and servants consumed 100 sheep a day. A Moab king named Mesa paid a yearly tribute or tax of 100,000 lambs and 100,000 rams to the king of Israel. Job had 7,000 sheep before his trouble, and 14,000 after his wealth was restored. The 14,000 sheep were a mark of God's blessing. You might say that as American people have a "dollar mentality," so the people of biblical times had a "sheep mentality." Thus, when Our Lord talked

about sheep and lambs, flocks and shepherds, the people were quite attuned to His words.

But Our Lord had a spiritual reason for speaking of such things. He used this familiar topic to express the mission of the Savior, so He says of Himself: "I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep." (John 10) We are God's sheep. Sheep are somewhat helpless when left alone. They are affectionate and docile, and they are in need of guidance. They are responsive to the shepherd and they act to please him. In the twelfth chapter of the second book of Kings, a lamb is pictured as growing up with a family as though it were one of the family. Isaias, speaking of the sufferings of Christ, speaks of Him as a sheep and a lamb. He says: "Though he was harshly treated, he submitted and opened not his mouth; like a lamb led to the slaughter or a sheep before the shearers, he was silent and opened not his mouth." (Isaias 53:7) St. John affectionately speaks of sheep and their great attachment to the shepherd which enables them to recognize His voice and to distinguish it from that of the hireling.

When Our Lord spoke His parable of the Good Shepherd, bad shepherds were everywhere to be found. When he proclaimed Himself to be the Good Shepherd, His message fell on ears of those who were hungry for a Good Shepherd. He spoke to those people who heard Him with their ears, and He speaks to us today. In the time of Our Lord, sheepfolds were to be found in open fields. They were enclosed with a fence made of clay, stones or wood. At night the flocks of different