

## Third Sunday of Easter, 2008

*“For you were as sheep going astray;  
but you are now converted to the shepherd and bishop of your souls.”*  
(1 Pet. 2–25)

These words are taken from St Peter's first Epistle which, as we heard today, begins by reminding us that we should live as strangers and pilgrims in this world; a people who are on a pilgrimage to our rightful home, the fulfilment of the destiny which God has planned for each of us; a life-long journey during which we continue to observe all the obligations of human existence — with whatever trials and sufferings may be our lot; and so that those who speak against us may, by the good works they see in us, glorify God in the day of visitation. Let us bear in mind the words of our Lord: “And again a little while and you shall see Me; and because I go to the Father.” As St Augustine tells us, that “little while” is the whole of life's journey; it often seems tedious and long. But, in St Augustine's own words, “It seems long because now time is still passing by; when the wait is over we shall see how short it was.”



We then must follow our pilgrimage in the spirit of today's liturgy — *I go to the Father.*” And there we must follow Thee, O Lord, who art the way, the truth and the life.

God has given every one of us a purpose to accomplish in this life through which one is gradually converted to the shepherd and bishop of souls. This means a life in which we are constantly seeking to know Jesus Christ and through Him God the father. We find what is called the *Shepherd discourse* in Chapter 10 of St John's gospel, which begins with Christ putting us on our guard so that we recognise the false shepherd. And our Lord clear tells us: “He that entereth by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.” And a little later, very solemnly, He says: “Amen! Amen! I say to you, I am the door of the sheep ... By Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved.” Pope Benedict XVI, in his book *Jesus of Nazareth*, writes: “This can only really mean that Jesus is establishing the criterion for those who will shepherd his flock after his ascension to the Father. The proof of a true shepherd is that he enters through Jesus as the door. For in this way it is ultimately Jesus who is the Shepherd — the flock “belongs” to Him alone.

This becomes apparent when Peter is entrusted with Jesus' own office as Shepherd. Three times the Lord says to Peter: "Feed my lambs," or "Feed my sheep." Peter is very clearly being appointed as Shepherd of Jesus' sheep and established in Jesus' office as Shepherd.

Jesus speaks of this entry – or better, this *being allowed to enter* through the door – when He asks Peter three times: "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" Notice first the utterly personal aspect of this calling; Simon is called by name – both by his own personal name, Simon, and by a name referring to his ancestry. And he is asked about the love that makes him one with Jesus. This is how he comes to the sheep "through Jesus": He takes them not as his own (Simon Peter'), but as Jesus' flock. It is because he comes to them through the door, *Jesus*, it is because he comes to them united with Jesus in love, that the sheep listen to the voice, the voice of Jesus himself; they are following not Simon but Jesus, from whom and through whom Simon comes to them, so that when he leads them it is Jesus Himself who leads. The whole investiture scene closes with Jesus saying to Peter, "Follow Me." Even the disciple who now goes ahead of the others as Shepherd must *follow* Jesus. And as the Lord declares to Peter after conferring upon him the office of Shepherd, this includes accepting the Cross, being prepared to give his life. This is what it means in practice when Jesus says: "I am the door." This is how Jesus Himself remains the Shepherd.

In this Holy Mass we pray the Lord that He show the light of His truth to those in error that they may return to the way of righteousness; in charity, that must always be our prayer; but we beg Him also to grant to all who profess themselves as Christians that they may reject what is contrary to the name of Christian, and follow only what is consonant with it. This we must pray and desire with our whole heart; to attain to so happy a position, we need to know Jesus "the door" of the sheep. In this jubilee year of the Immaculate Conception, the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the apparitions of Our Lady at Lourdes, let us frequently unite ourselves with all who are on pilgrimage there; place ourselves in spirit before the grotto, and talk to our blessed Mother who loves us with a love that is one with Jesus love for us on Calvary, asking her to enlighten us as we pray our daily rosary, so that through those mysteries we may know Him as He really is — a loving Shepherd who still leads us through the Shepherd and guide He has appointed as His Vicar on earth.