

Lambs among Wolves

Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time - Lk 10:1-12, 17-20
Ave Maria Catholic Church, July 3, 2022 - Fr. David M Vidal

A 17th Century philosopher, Thomas Hobbes, (1588–1679), used to say: “Man is wolf to man” (*Homo homini lupus*) or “A man is a wolf to another man.” This was his presentation of human society “by nature.”

Hobbes taught that all goods are relative, but one is fundamental: self-preservation. So, everyone must preserve his life and defend it against anyone at all costs. This interpretation of humanity establishes egoism as the fundamental principle of human actions.

Hobbes also taught that natural ties among men are artificial. According to his understanding, relationships among human beings are mere agreements since man is not social by nature. On the contrary, people are constantly taking pleasure in fighting each other and speaking ill of each other.

These two principles – based on egoism and the anti-social theory – destroy the true image of man.

Man was created in the image and likeness of God. In the book of Genesis (1:27-28), we read, “*God created mankind in his image; in the image of God, he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them: Be fertile and multiply.*”

Man was not created to be a wolf to another man. On the contrary, man was created out of love and for the sake of love. The love of God created man, and God gave man the vocation to love.

What is Hobbes seeing, or what is he describing? Without admitting it, Hobbes describes the sinful man who becomes a wolf in the fallen world of wolves. Hobbes describes the fallen man, not the redeemed man.

In one of his *Audiences*, Benedict XVI taught that Christians are called to live differently, without “*giving in to the temptation of becoming wolves among wolves.*” We must not follow the desires of the “fallen man.” Our vocation is higher: we must follow the beautiful plan of God who, out of love, created us in his image. We must follow the redemptive plan of God who, out of love, gave us his Son to be our Model.

Let us pause for a moment to contemplate Jesus, our Model.

In the first pages of his gospel, Saint John recalls the encounter between Jesus and John the Baptist: “*The next day John saw Jesus coming to him, and he said, ‘Behold, the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’*” (Jn 1:29). “*Again, the next day John was*

standing there with two of his disciples. And looking upon Jesus as he walked by, he said, 'Behold, the lamb of God!'" (Jn 1:35-36).

St. John the Baptist's words confirmed the images of the Messiah given in the prophecies. The prophet Isaiah describes him in this way: *"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,"* (Is 53:7). *"Because he surrendered himself to death and was counted amongst the wicked. And he shall take away the sins of many and win pardon for their offenses,"* (Is 53:12).

To this image of the lamb of expiation, St. John the Evangelist attributes to Jesus, the characteristics of the paschal lamb: *"When [the soldiers] came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs; but one of the soldiers opened his side, with a lance, and immediately there came out blood and water . . . These things came to pass that the Scripture might be fulfilled, 'Not a bone of him shall you break'"* (Jn 19:32-36).

These were not words spoken by a prophet. They were a description of the ritual of the Jewish Pasch (Ex 12:46; Num 9:12) that prefigured the way in which they were to offer the paschal lamb. Jesus is the True Lamb who redeems the sheep! (*Exulted*, Easter Vigil).

Today, the Gospel invites us to follow Jesus, our Model.

In the Gospel, Jesus tells his disciples, *"I am sending you like lambs among wolves,"* (Luke 10: 3).

This is a surprising image. Lambs are not normally sent among wolves. Wolves prey on lambs. They kill them and then they devour them. However, the disciples of Jesus must be lambs. They take with them a message that contradicts much of what the world stands for. The world stands for pride, egoism, self-sufficiency, autonomy, greed, and violence.

But Jesus invites us to be *"a sign of contradiction."* The question is: are we ready to be lambs among wolves? You may ask: What does it mean to be a lamb?

First, it means to be a person of peace. Jesus is the Prince of Peace, and he invites us to be people of peace. Saint Augustine describes peace as the *"tranquility of order,"* (*The City of God*, 19). Peace is possible when all things in the universe have their proper place established by God, their creator. Peace is possible if our hearts are in order and if we love God with our whole heart, mind, and soul, and our neighbor as Jesus taught us. The Lamb of God came to bring us peace: reconciliation with God and with our brethren.

Second, it means to be ready for a sacrifice: Jesus never promised his followers an easy life. If he had, there would be no shortage of disciples. Jesus invites us to be like lambs, ready to be sacrificed because sacrifice is the sign of mature love. Sacrifice purifies and

ennobles us. In fact, there is no greater expression of love than the sacrificial, unselfish, and self-giving love of those who are ready to offer their lives for the good of others.

Third, it means to be part of Jesus's flock: The wolves are part of a pack, but they have no shepherd. Nobody cares for them. In a way, they are on their own, and according to Hobbes, they follow the instinct of self-preservation. They just gather to kill the prey.

But we are not an island. We form part of Jesus's flock. We are not on our own. Jesus is our Good Shepherd. He cares for us, He leads us, He loves us, and He gives his life for us.

We are not called to be "wolves among wolves." Pride, egoism, greed, and violence will not succeed. On the contrary, the humble, self-giving, and peaceful act of offering that is united to Christ crucified, brings the absolute guarantee of victory.

There is still time to become lambs. There is still time to be part of Jesus's flock. There is still time to regain innocence and purity. There is still time to be converted anew and to be more like Jesus. Let us accept this invitation from the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. Amen