

Saint Augustine's Tractate 45 on John 10:1-10

1. Our Lord's discourse to the Jews began in connection with the man who was born blind and was restored to sight. Your Charity therefore ought to know and be advised that today's lesson is interwoven with that one. For when the Lord had said, "For judgment I have come into this world; that they who see not might see, and they who see might be made blind,"—which, on the occasion of its reading, we expounded according to our ability,—some of the Pharisees said, "Are we blind also?" To whom He replied, "If you were blind, you should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; [therefore] your sin remains." To these words He added what we have been hearing today when the lesson was read.

2. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that enters not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber." For they declared that they were not blind; yet could they see only by being the sheep of Christ. Whence claimed they possession of the light, who were acting as thieves against the day? Because, then, of their vain and proud and incurable arrogance, did the Lord Jesus subjoin these words, wherein He has given us also salutary lessons, if we lay them to heart. For there are many who, according to a custom of this life, are called good people,—good men, good women, innocent, and observers as it were of what is commanded in the law; paying respect to their parents, abstaining from adultery, doing no murder, committing no theft, giving no false witness against any one, and observing all else that the law requires—yet are not Christians; and for the most part ask boastfully, like these men, "Are we blind also?" But just because all these things that they do, and know not to what end they should have reference, they do to no purpose, the Lord has set forth in today's lesson the similitude of His own flock, and of the door that leads into the sheepfold. Pagans may say, then, We live well. If they enter not by the door, what good will that do them, whereof they boast? For to this end ought good living to benefit everyone, that it may be given him to live forever: for to whomsoever eternal life is not given, of what benefit is the living well? For they ought not to be spoken of as even living well, who either from blindness know not the end of a right life, or in their pride despise it. But no one has the true and certain hope of living always, unless he know the life, that it is Christ; and enter by the gate into the sheepfold.

3. Such, accordingly, for the most part seek to persuade men to live well, and yet not to be Christians. By another way they wish to climb up, to steal and to kill, not as the shepherd, to preserve and to save. And thus there have been certain philosophers, holding many subtle discussions about the virtues and the vices, dividing, defining, drawing out to their close the most acute processes of reasoning, filling books, brandishing their wisdom with rattling jaws; who would even dare to say to people, Follow us, keep to our sect, if you would live happily. But they had not entered by the door: they wished to destroy, to slay, and to murder.

4. What shall I say of such? Look, the Pharisees themselves were in the habit of reading, and in what they read, their voices re-echoed the Christ, they hoped He would come, and recognized Him not when present; they boasted, even they, of being amongst those who saw, that is, among the wise, and they disowned the Christ, and entered not in by the door. Therefore would such also, if they chanced to seduce any, seduce them to be slaughtered and murdered, not to be brought into liberty. Let us leave these also to

themselves, and look at those who glory in the name of Christ Himself, and see whether even they perchance are entering in by the door.

5. For there are countless numbers who not only boast that they see, but would have it appear that they are enlightened by Christ; yet are they heretics. Have even they somehow entered by the gate? Surely not. Sabellius says, He who is the Son is Himself the Father; but if the Son, then is there no Father. He enters not by the door, who asserts that the Son is the Father. Arius says, The Father is one thing, the Son is another thing. He would say rightly if he said, Another person; but not another thing. For when he says, Another thing, he contradicts Him who says in his hearing, "I and my Father are One." Neither does he therefore enter by the door; for he preaches a Christ such as he fabricates for himself, not such as the truth declares Him. You have the name, you have not the reality. Christ is the name of something; keep hold of the thing itself, if you would benefit by the name. Another, I know not from whence, says with Photinus, Christ is mere man; He is not God. He enters not in by the door, for Christ is both man and God. But why need I make many references, and enumerate the many vanities of heretics? Keep hold of this, that Christ's sheepfold is the Catholic Church. Whoever would enter the sheepfold, let him enter by the door, let him preach the true Christ. Not only let him preach the true Christ, but seek Christ's glory, not his own; for many, by seeking their own glory, have scattered Christ's sheep, instead of gathering them. For Christ the Lord is a low gateway: he who enters by this gateway must humble himself, that he may be able to enter with head unharmed. But he that humbles not, but exalts himself, wishes to climb over the wall; and he that climbs over the wall, is exalted only to fall.

6. Thus far, however, the Lord Jesus speaks in covert language; not as yet is He understood. He names the door, He names the sheepfold, He names the sheep: all this He sets forth, but does not yet explain. Let us read on then, for He is coming to those words, wherein He may think proper to give us some explanation of what He has said; from the explanation of which He will perhaps enable us to understand also what He has not explained. For He gives us what is plain, for food; what is obscure, for exercise. "He that enters not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbs up some other way." Woe to the wretch, for he is sure to fall! Let him then be humble, let him enter by the door: let him walk on the level ground, and he shall not stumble. "The same," He says, "is a thief and a robber." The sheep of another he desires to call his own sheep,—his own, that is, as carried off by stealth, for the purpose, not of saving, but of slaying them. Therefore is he a thief, because what is another's he calls his own; a robber, because what he has stolen he also kills. "But he that enters in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep: to him the porter opens." Concerning this porter we shall make inquiry, when we have heard of the Lord Himself what is the door and who is the shepherd. "And the sheep hear his voice: and he calls his own sheep by name." For He has their names written in the book of life. "He calls his own sheep by name." Hence, says the apostle, "The Lord knows them that are His." 2 Timothy 2:19 "And he leads them out. And when he puts forth his own sheep, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger do they not follow, but do flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers." These are veiled words, full of topics of inquiry, pregnant with sacramental signs. Let us follow then, and listen to the Master as He makes some

opening into these obscurities; and perhaps by the opening He makes, He will cause us to enter.

7. "This parable spoke Jesus unto them; but they understood not what He spoke unto them." Nor we also, perhaps. What, then, is the difference between them and us, before even we can understand these words? This, that we on our part knock, that it may be opened unto us; while they, by disowning Christ, refused to enter for salvation, and preferred remaining outside to be destroyed. In as far, then, as we listen to these words with a pious mind, in as far as, before we understand them, we believe them to be true and divine, we stand at a great distance from these men. For when two persons are listening to the words of the gospel, the one impious, the other pious, and some of these are such as neither perhaps understands, the one says, It has said nothing; the other says, It has said the truth, and what it has said is good, but we do not understand it. This latter, because he believes, now knocks, that he may be worthy to have it opened up to him, if he continue knocking; but the other still hears the words, "If you believe not, you shall not understand." Why do I draw your attention to this? Even for this reason, that when I have explained as I can these obscure words, or, because of their great abstruseness, I have either myself failed to arrive at an understanding of them, or wanted the faculty of explaining what I do understand, or everyone has been so dull as not to follow me, even when I give the explanation, yet should he not despair of himself; but continue in faith, walk on in the way, and hear the apostle saying, "And if in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless whereto we have already attained, let us walk therein." Philippians 3:15-16

8. Let us begin, then, with hearing His exposition of what we have heard Him propounding. "Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep." See, He has opened the very door which was shut in His former description. He Himself is the door. We have come to know it; let us enter, or rejoice that we are already within. "All that ever came are thieves and robbers." What is this, Lord, "All that ever came"? How so have You not come? But understand; I said, "All that ever came," meaning, of course, exclusive of myself. Let us recollect then. Before His coming came the prophets: were they thieves and robbers? God forbid. They did not come apart from Him, for they came with Him. When about to come, He sent heralds, but retained possession of the hearts of His messengers. Do you wish to know that they came with Him, who is Himself ever existent? Certainly He assumed human flesh at the time appointed. But what means that "ever"? "In the beginning was the Word." John 1:1 With Him, therefore, came those who came with the word of God. "I am," said He, "the way, and the truth, and the life." John 14:6 If He is the truth, with Him came those who were truthful. As many, therefore, as were apart from Him, were "thieves and robbers," that is, had come to steal and to destroy.

9. "But the sheep did not hear them." This is a more important point, "the sheep did not hear them." Before the advent of our Lord Jesus Christ, when He came in humility in the flesh, righteous men preceded, believing in the same way in Him who was to come, as we believe in Him who has come. Times vary, but not faith. For verbs themselves also vary with the tense, when they are variously declined. He is to come, has one sound; He has come, has another: there is a change in the sound between He is to come, and He has come: yet the same faith unites both,—both those who believed that He would come, and those who have believed that He is come. At different times, indeed,

but by the one doorway of faith, that is, by Christ, do we see that both have entered. We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin, that He came in the flesh, suffered, rose again, ascended into heaven: all this, just as you hear verbs of the past tense, we believe to be already fulfilled. In that faith a partnership is also held with us by those fathers who believed that He would be born of the Virgin, would suffer, would rise again, would ascend into heaven; for to such the apostle pointed when he said, "But we having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak." 2 Corinthians 4:13 The prophet said, "I believed, therefore have I spoken:" the apostle says, "We also believe, and therefore speak." But to let you know that their faith is one, listen to him saying, "Having the same spirit of faith, we also believe." So also in another place, "For I would not have you ignorant, brethren, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea: and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and did all eat the same spiritual meat, and did all drink the same spiritual drink." The Red Sea signifies baptism; Moses, their leader through the Red Sea, signifies Christ; the people, who passed through, signify believers; the death of the Egyptians signifies the abolition of sins. Under different signs there is the same faith. It is with different signs as with different words [verbs]; for verbs change their sounds through the tenses, and verbs are indeed nothing else than signs. For they are words because of what they signify: take away the meaning from a word, and it becomes a senseless sound. All, therefore, have become signs. Was not the same faith theirs by whom these signs were employed, and by whom were foretold in prophecy the very things which we believe? Certainly it was: but they believed that they were yet to come, and we, that they have come. In like manner does he also say, "They all drank the same spiritual drink;" "the same spiritual," for it was not the same material [drink]. For what was it they drank? "For they drank of the spiritual Rock that followed them; and that Rock was Christ." 1 Corinthians 10:1-4 See, then, how that while the faith remained, the signs were varied. There the rock was Christ; to us that is Christ which is placed on the altar of God. And they, as a great sacramental sign of the same Christ, drank the water flowing from the rock: what we drink is known to believers. If one's thoughts turn to the visible form, the thing is different; if to the meaning that addresses the understanding, they drank the same spiritual drink. As many, then, at that time as believed, whether Abraham, or Isaac, or Jacob, or Moses, or the other patriarchs or prophets who foretold of Christ, were sheep, and heard Christ. His voice, and not another's, did they hear. The Judge was present in the person of the Crier. For even when the judge speaks through the crier, the clerk does not make it, The crier said; but the judge said. But others there are whom the sheep did not hear, in whom Christ's voice had no place,—wanderers, uttering falsehoods, prating inanities, fabricating vanities, misleading the miserable.

10. Why is it, then, that I have said, This is a more important point? What is there about it obscure and difficult to understand? Listen, I beseech you. See, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself came and preached. Much more surely was that the Shepherd's voice which was uttered by the very mouth of the Shepherd. For if the Shepherd's voice came through the prophets, how much more did the Shepherd's own tongue give utterance to the Shepherd's voice? Yet all did not hear Him. But what are we to think? Those who did hear, were they sheep? Lo? Judas heard, and was a wolf: he followed, but, clad in sheep-skin, he was laying snares for the Shepherd. Some, again, of those who crucified

Christ did not hear, and yet were sheep; for such He saw in the crowd when He said, "When you have lifted up the Son of man, then shall you know that I am He." John 8:28 Now, how is this question to be solved? They that are not sheep do hear, and they that are sheep do not hear. Some, who are wolves, follow the Shepherd's voice; and some, that are sheep, contradict it. Last of all, the sheep slay the Shepherd. The point is solved; for someone in reply says, But when they did not hear, as yet they were not sheep, they were then wolves: the voice, when it was heard, changed them, and out of wolves transformed them into sheep; and so, when they became sheep, they heard, and found the Shepherd, and followed Him. They built their hopes on the Shepherd's promises, because they obeyed His precepts.

11. That question has been solved in a way, and perhaps satisfies every one. But I bare still a subject of concern, and what concerns me I shall impart to you, that, in some sort inquiring together, I may through His revelation be found worthy with you to attain the solution. Hear, then, what it is that moves me. By the Prophet Ezekiel the Lord rebukes the shepherds, and among other things says of the sheep, "The wandering sheep have ye not recalled." Ezekiel 34:4 He both declares it *a wanderer*, and calls it *a sheep*. If, while wandering, it was a sheep, whose voice was it hearing to lead it astray? For doubtless it would not be straying were it hearing the shepherd's voice: but it strayed just because it heard another's voice; it heard the voice of the thief and the robber. Surely the sheep do not hear the voice of robbers. "Those that came," He said,—and we are to understand, *apart from me*,—that is, "those that came *apart from me* are thieves and robbers, and the sheep did not hear them." Lord, if the sheep did not hear them, how can the sheep wander? If the sheep hear only You, and You are the truth, whoever hears the truth cannot certainly fall into error. But they err, and are called sheep. For if, in the very midst of their wandering, they were not called sheep, it would not be said by Ezekiel, "The wandering sheep have ye not recalled." How is it at the same time a wanderer and a sheep? Has it heard the voice of another? Surely "the sheep did not hear them." Accordingly many are just now being gathered into Christ's fold, and from being heretics are becoming Catholics. They are rescued from the thieves, and restored to the shepherds: and sometimes they murmur, and become wearied of Him that calls them back, and have no true knowledge of him that would murder them; nevertheless also, when, after a struggle, those have come who are sheep, they recognize the Shepherd's voice, and are glad they have come, and are ashamed of their wandering. When, then, they were glorying in that state of error as in the truth, and were certainly not hearing the Shepherd's voice, but were following another, were they sheep, or were they not? If they were sheep, how can it be the case that the sheep do not listen to aliens? If they were not sheep, wherefore the rebuke addressed to those to whom it is said, "The wandering sheep have ye not recalled"? In the case also of those already become catholic Christians, and believers of good promise, evils sometimes occur: they are seduced into error, and after their error are restored. When they were thus seduced, and were re-baptized, or after the companionship of the Lord's fold were turned back again into their former error, were they sheep, or were they not? Certainly they were Catholics. If they were faithful Catholics, they were sheep. If they were sheep, how was it that they could listen to the voice of a stranger when the Lord says, "The sheep did not hear them"?

12. You hear, brethren, the great importance of the question. I say then, "The Lord knows them that are His." 2 Timothy 2:19 He knows those who were foreknown, He knows those who were predestinated; because it is said of Him, "For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, whom He did predestinate, them He also called; and whom He called, them He also justified; and whom He justified, them He also glorified. If God be for us, who can be against us?" Add to this: "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how has He not with Him also freely given us all things?" But what "us"? Those who are foreknown, predestinated, justified, glorified; regarding whom there follows, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" Romans 7:29-33 Therefore "the Lord knows them that are His;" they are the sheep. Such sometimes do not know themselves, but the Shepherd knows them, according to this predestination, this foreknowledge of God, according to the election of the sheep before the foundation of the world: for so says also the apostle, "According as He has chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world." Ephesians 1:4 According, then, to this divine foreknowledge and predestination, how many sheep are outside, how many wolves within! and how many sheep are inside, how many wolves without! How many are now living in wantonness who will yet be chaste! how many are blaspheming Christ who will yet believe in Him! how many are giving themselves to drunkenness who will yet be sober! how many are preying on other people property who will yet freely give of their own! Nevertheless at present they are hearing the voice of another, they are following strangers. In like manner, how many are praising within who will yet blaspheme; are chaste who will yet be fornicators; are sober who will wallow hereafter in drink; are standing who will by and by fall! These are not the sheep. (For we speak of those who were predestinated,— of those whom the Lord knows that they are His.) And yet these, so long as they keep right, listen to the voice of Christ. Yea, these hear, the others do not; and yet, according to predestination, these are not sheep, while the others are.

13. There remains still the question, which I now think may meanwhile thus be solved. There is a voice of some kind,—there is, I say, a certain kind of voice of the Shepherd, in respect of which the sheep hear not strangers, and in respect of which those who are not sheep do not hear Christ. What a word is this! "He that endures to the end, the same shall be saved." Matthew 10:22 No one of His own is indifferent to such a voice, a stranger does not hear it: for this reason also does He announce it to the former, that he may abide perseveringly with Himself to the end; but by one who is wanting in such persevering continuance with Him, such a word remains unheard. One has come to Christ, and has heard word after word of one kind and another, all of them true, all of them salutary; and among all the rest is also this utterance, "He that endures to the end, the same shall be saved." He who has heard this is one of the sheep. But there was, perhaps, someone listening to it, who treated it with dislike, with coldness, and heard it as that of a stranger. If he was predestinated, he strayed for the time, but he was not lost forever: he returns to hear what he has neglected, to do what he has heard. For if he is one of those who are predestinated, then both his very wandering and his future conversion have been foreknown by God: if he has strayed away, he will return to hear that voice of the Shepherd, and to follow Him who says, "He that endures to the end, the same shall be saved." A good voice, brethren, it is; true and shepherd-like, the very

voice of salvation in the tabernacles of the righteous. For it is easy to hear Christ, easy to praise the gospel, easy to applaud the preacher: but to endure unto the end, is peculiar to the sheep who hear the Shepherd's voice. A temptation befalls you, endure thou to the end, for the temptation will not endure to the end. And what is that end to which you shall endure? Even till you reach the end of your pathway. For as long as you hear not Christ, He is your adversary in the pathway, that is, in this mortal life. And what does He say? "Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are in the way with him." Matthew 5:25 You have heard, hast believed, hast agreed. If you have been at enmity, agree. If you have got the opportunity of coming to an agreement, keep not up the quarrel longer. For you know not when your way will be ended, and it is known to Him. If you are a sheep, and if you endure to the end, you shall be saved: and therefore it is that His own despise not that voice, and strangers hear it not. According to my ability, as He gave me the power, I have either explained to you or gone over with you a subject of great profundity. If any have failed fully to understand, let him retain his piety, and the truth will be revealed: and let not those who have understood vaunt themselves as swifter at the expense of the slower, lest in their vaunting they turn out of the track, and the slower more easily attain the goal. But let all of us be guided by Him to whom we say, "Lead me, O Lord, in Your way, and I will walk in Your truth."

14. By this, then, which the Lord has explained, that He Himself is the door, let us find entrance to what He has set forth, but not explained. And indeed who it is that is the Shepherd, although He has not told us in the lesson we have read today, yet in that which follows He very plainly tells us: "I am the good Shepherd." And although He had not said so, whom else but Himself ought we to have understood in those words where He says, "He that enters in by the door is the Shepherd of the sheep. To Him the porter opens: and the sheep hear His voice: and He calls His own sheep by name, and leads them out. And when He puts forth His own sheep, He goes before them, and the sheep follow Him: for they know His voice"? For who else calls His own sheep by name, and leads them hence unto eternal life, but He who knows the names of those that are fore-ordained? Hence He said to His disciples, "Rejoice that your names are written in heaven;" Luke 10:20 for from this it is that He calls them by name. And who else puts them forth, save He who puts away their sins, that, freed from their grievous fetters, they may be able to follow Him? And who has gone before them to the place whither they are to follow Him, but He who, rising from the dead, dies no more; and death shall have no more dominion over Him; Romans 6:9 and who, when He was manifest here in the flesh, said, "Father, I will that they also whom You have given me be with me where I am"? John 17:24 Hence it is that He says, "I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture." In this He clearly shows that not only the Shepherd, but the sheep also enter in by the door.

15. But what is this, "He shall go in and out, and find pasture"? To enter indeed into the Church by Christ the door, is eminently good; but to go out of the Church, as this same John the evangelist says in his epistle, "They went out from us, but they were not of us," 1 John 2:19 is certainly otherwise than good. Such a going out could not then be commended by the good Shepherd, when He said, "And he shall go in and out, and find pasture." There is therefore not only some sort of entrance, but some outgoing also that is good, by the good door, which is Christ. But what is that praiseworthy and blessed outgoing? I might say, indeed, that we enter when we engage in some inward

exercise of thought; and go out, when we take to some active work without: and since, as the apostle says, Christ dwells in our hearts by faith, Ephesians 3:17 to enter by Christ is to give ourselves to thought in accordance with that faith; but to go out by Christ is, in accordance also with that same faith, to take to outside works, that is to say, in the presence of others. Hence, also, we read in a psalm, "Man goes forth to his work;" and the Lord Himself says, "Let your works shine before men." Matthew 5:16 But I am better pleased that the Truth Himself, like a good Shepherd, and therefore a good Teacher, has in a certain measure reminded us how we ought to understand His words, "He shall go in and out, and find pasture," when He added in the sequel, "The thief comes not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I have come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." For He seems to me to have meant, That they may have life in coming in, and have it more abundantly at their departure. For no one can pass out by the door—that is, by Christ—to that eternal life which shall be open to the sight, unless by the same door—that is, by the same Christ—he has entered His church, which is His fold, to the temporal life, which is lived in faith. Therefore, He says, "I have come that they may have life," that is, faith, which works by love; Galatians 5:6 by which faith they enter the fold that they may live, for the just lives by faith: Romans 1:17 "and that they may have it more abundantly," who, enduring unto the end, pass out by this same door, that is, by the faith of Christ; for as true believers they die, and will have life more abundantly when they come whither the Shepherd has preceded them, where they shall die no more. Although, therefore, there is no want of pasture even here in the fold,—for we may understand the words "and shall find pasture" as referring to both, that is, both to their going in and their going out,—yet there only will they find the true pasture. where they shall be filled who hunger and thirst after righteousness, Matthew 5:6 —such pasture as was found by him to whom it was said, "Today shall you be with me in paradise." Luke 23:43 But how He Himself is the door, and Himself the Shepherd, so that He also may in a certain respect be understood as going in and out by Himself, and who is the porter, it would be too long to inquire today, and, according to the grace given us by Himself, to unfold in the way of dissertation.