

Brothers and sisters in Christ,

A few weeks ago I gave a reflection at daily Mass on Matthew 7:15-20 where Jesus says to beware of the false prophets, saying they “come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.” Since many people had asked for a copy of that reflection, I figured I would make it into an article for the bulletin. This Gospel passage raises an interesting question: who exactly are these ravenous wolves in sheep’s clothing? Many of the Church Fathers have speculated over who Jesus was talking about. Many of them, for example, believe that He was referring to heretics (someone who maintains religious opinions contrary to those accepted by the Church and persistently rejects the truth). Saint John Chrysostom takes a different route when examining the words of our Lord. He noted in one of his homilies that the ravenous wolves in sheep’s clothing are “them that are of a corrupt life, yet wear a mask of virtue” (Homily 23 on Matthew). They are the hypocrites that Jesus often rebukes throughout the Gospels. They are the Christians who follow Christ only in outward appearance. They are not the Christians we were called to be. We are called to follow Christ not simply by appearance, but in our hearts, minds, bodies, and souls. For as we know, God will look upon us not by outward appearance, but by our hearts (1 Samuel 16:7). While the wolves may look like identical sheep when they put on sheep’s clothing, they are wolves nonetheless.

If we take a step back and look at the passage before it (Matthew 7:13-14) it may help shed some more light on what our Lord wants us to understand. In this passage, Jesus says that the gate that leads to eternal life is narrow and difficult to enter. Taking everything in context, we can rightly gather from this that only true sheep can enter the Kingdom of God with Christ the Good Shepherd as the lead. A true sheep is one that is a Christian behind closed doors, one that follows Christ in all areas of life, one that lives and strives for virtue and holiness. In Matthew 6:6, Jesus says “when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” Christ the Good Shepherd promised us that He will lead us through the narrow gate and will not let us go astray if we follow Him and give our lives to Him. He will guide us into everlasting salvation with our heavenly Father. Let us then heed the words of our Lord. May we not be ravenous wolves in sheep clothing, but true and virtuous sheep that follow Christ the Good Shepherd, so that we too may gain eternal life.