



When Jesus said to His disciples, *“Behold, I am sending you out as sheep among wolves; therefore, be as shrewd as serpents and as innocent as doves”* (Matthew 10:16), He was preparing them for a difficult mission. He did not promise them worldly success, recognition, or security. Instead, He warned them that they would be persecuted, misunderstood, and that their faith would be tested.

This warning was not only for the disciples of that time but also for us today. We live in a world increasingly hostile to the Christian faith. The dominant culture ridicules Gospel values, and openly professing one’s faith can lead to rejection, marginalization, or even persecution. But Jesus did not leave us without guidance: He asked us to be both shrewd and innocent, wise without losing our purity.

What does this mean for us today? How can we live as sheep among wolves without falling into despair or lukewarmness? In this article, we will explore the origin and meaning of Jesus’ words, their historical context, their application throughout Church history, and how we can live them out in our daily lives.

1. The Biblical Context: Jesus Prepares His Disciples

The Gospel of Matthew places us in a crucial moment of Jesus’ ministry: the sending out of the Twelve Apostles. Jesus gives them precise instructions on how to preach the Kingdom of God and warns them about the challenges they will face.

The image of “sheep among wolves” is powerful. Sheep are gentle, defenseless creatures that rely entirely on their shepherd. Wolves, on the other hand, are predators that seek to divide and devour. Jesus does not say that His disciples will become wolves to defend themselves, nor that they should flee; rather, He deliberately sends them into this reality with a strategy of prudence and simplicity.

St. John Chrysostom, commenting on this passage, says: *“If they had been sent as wolves among wolves, they would have fought and conquered with violence. But since they were sent as sheep among wolves, the victory does not belong to man but to the grace of God.”*

2. Church History: Sheep Among Wolves Throughout the Ages

From the very beginning, Christians have lived this reality. The first martyrs, such as St. Stephen or the Christians who died in the Colosseum, were witnesses of unwavering faith in



the face of a hostile world.

One of the most striking examples is the story of the Martyrs of Lyon (2nd century). In this Roman city in Gaul, Christians faced brutal persecution. Among them was St. Blandina, a slave who, despite being considered insignificant by society, endured unimaginable tortures without renouncing her faith. Her last words were: *“I am a Christian, and among us, no evil is done.”* Like a true sheep among wolves, she did not respond with hatred or violence but with love and fidelity to Christ.

Later, in the Middle Ages and modern times, this image continued to be a reality. Missionaries like St. Francis Xavier traveled to distant lands, knowing they might be rejected or even killed. In the 20th century, figures such as St. Maximilian Kolbe or the martyrs of the Cristero War in Mexico bear witness to this command of Jesus—men and women who faced evil with courage, without losing their faith or their charity.

3. How to Live This Calling Today

Although in many places Christians no longer face bloody persecution, the world remains a battleground for the soul.

Today, the “wolves” take new forms:

- **Religious indifference**, which treats faith as irrelevant.
- **Moral relativism**, which ridicules truth and Christian values.
- **Anti-Christian ideologies**, which seek to silence the Gospel.
- **Lukewarmness and comfort**, which can lead us to abandon the fight.

So how can we be faithful to Jesus’ command in this context?

a) As Shrewd as Serpents

Christian prudence is not cowardice or selfish cunning. It is the ability to discern how and when to speak, how to act wisely without compromising the truth. St. Paul exemplifies this well when, in the Areopagus of Athens (Acts 17), he does not directly attack Greek beliefs but starts from them to proclaim Christ.

Today, this means giving witness to our faith without falling into unnecessary provocations, using media wisely, educating ourselves in doctrine so we can respond with firmness and charity.



b) As Innocent as Doves

Gospel simplicity means trusting in God without duplicity or hidden agendas. It means living our faith authentically, without shame or fear. It means that even if the world rejects us, we do not respond with hatred or resentment but with love and faithfulness.

An extraordinary example of this is Cardinal Francis Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan of Vietnam. He was imprisoned for 13 years, 9 of them in solitary confinement. Instead of growing bitter, he turned his cell into a space of prayer and evangelization. Using scraps of paper, he wrote messages of hope for other prisoners. He was a sheep among wolves but never lost his light.

4. The Challenge of Faith in the 21st Century

Today, more than ever, Jesus' call resonates strongly. It is not about living in fear but with courage and hope. Being a Christian is not easy, but it is the greatest honor and mission we can receive.

How can we respond to Christ's call?

- **Strengthening our faith** through prayer, study, and the sacraments.
- **Living with coherence**, not being ashamed of the Gospel in our daily environments.
- **Loving our enemies**, not responding with hatred to those who attack our faith.
- **Being light in the culture**, promoting Christian values in our families, workplaces, and society.

St. John Paul II said: *“Do not be afraid. Open wide the doors to Christ.”* In a world that seems eager to devour faith, the answer is not to hide or fight with the enemy's weapons but to trust that the victory belongs to God.

Christ sends us today as sheep among wolves. He calls us to be prudent without being calculating, courageous without being violent, and faithful without being fanatical. We are not alone. He goes with us, and that is our greatest strength.

May the Holy Spirit give us the grace to be brave and faithful witnesses to the very end.