

Good Shepherd Sunday, 3rd May 2020-Fourth Sunday of Easter

Shepherd me God

Acts 2:14, 36-41; 1 Peter 2:20-25; John 10:1-10

We shall begin our reflection on the Word of God with the comforting words of prophet Ezekiel who proclaimed God's promise to his people: "For thus says the Lord God: I myself will look after and tend my sheep . . . The lost I will seek out, the strayed I will bring back, the injured I will bind up, the sick I will heal . . . You, my sheep, you are the sheep of my pasture" (Ezekiel 34:11-31).

The words of the prophet were soothing to the ears of the people of Israel. The promise of God brought healing to their weary hearts. We can have a deeper appreciation for these words if we know who a shepherd was in the Middle East. Judea was more of a pastoral than an agricultural country. The shepherd had a tough assignment. The shepherd protected the sheep from going astray, from being attacked by wild animals and from being stolen by thieves. The shepherd was required to have constant vigilance, fearless courage and a compassionate love for his flock. The shepherd had a leather bag, a sling for self-defence, a staff to protect the sheep from wild animals and a rod, which is the shepherd's crook, to guide the sheep.

In the evening, while gathering the sheep, the shepherd held his rod across the entrance of the sheepfold and every sheep had to pass under the rod. As the sheep passed through, the shepherd quickly and personally examined every animal. In Judea the sheep were raised for wool and not for meat.

Therefore, the sheep stayed on with the shepherd for a very long time. The shepherd knew the sheep by name and he had an intimate relationship with every sheep. While grazing his flock, the shepherd would lead in order to check whether the path was safe for the sheep to follow.

This brief description of the shepherd and his intimate relationship with his sheep corresponds to the picture of Jesus the Good Shepherd. In the gospel passage that we heard today, Jesus presents himself as a good shepherd. There are many examples in the gospel passages, which endorse this image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. In the gospel of Matthew Jesus declares: "I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Matthew 9:14). In the gospel of Mark when Jesus saw the large crowd he was moved with compassion for them for they were like sheep without a shepherd (Mark 6:34). In the gospel of Luke Jesus narrates the parable of the lost sheep and the joy of the shepherd on finding the lost sheep (Luke 15:3-7). The gospel passage today is an open declaration of Jesus being the Good Shepherd. In this context Jesus makes two claims.

THE FIRST CLAIM: I KNOW MY SHEEP BY NAME

A man in Australia was arrested and charged with stealing a sheep. However, he claimed emphatically that it was one of his own that had been missing for many days. When the case went to court, the judge was puzzled, not knowing how to decide the matter. At last he asked that the sheep be brought into the courtroom. Then he ordered the plaintiff to step outside and call the animal. The sheep made no response except to raise its head and look frightened. The judge then instructed the

defendant to go to the courtyard and call the sheep. When the accused man began to make his distinctive call, the sheep ran toward the door. It was obvious that he recognized the familiar voice of his master. "His sheep knows him," said the judge. "Case dismissed!"

When Jesus claims that he knows his sheep by name he indicates the personal relationship that he has with his disciples and with his people. In the eyes of Jesus each one of us is not a number, or a case, we are human persons with a heart that is beating for love and comfort. Like the shepherd, Jesus is dedicated to each of us. He is present to us every single moment and every single day. Therefore he says: "I am with you always until the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). Even if we were to go astray, even if we were lost, even if we were to desert the shepherd, he will always seek for us with compassion and with patient love. What God said to the chosen people through prophet Isaiah, Jesus tells to each of us personally: "Do not be afraid . . . I have called you by name . . . You are precious to me . . . Do not be afraid . . . I am with you" (Isaiah 43:1, 4-5).

THE SECOND CLAIM OF JESUS IS: I AM THE GATE

In his book, *The Holy Land*, John Kellman describes a sheepfold in the open Rocky Mountains. It consists of a circular stonewall about four feet high with an opening in it. Kellman says that one-day a Holy Land tourist saw a sheep fold near Hebron. He asked a shepherd sitting nearby, "Where's the gate for your sheep fold?" The shepherd said, "I am the gate". The shepherd then told the tourist how he herded his flock into the fold each

night. Then he lay down across the narrow entrance. No sheep could leave the fold, and no wild animal could enter it, without stepping on his body.

This story enables us to capture the claim of Jesus: "I am the Gate". This claim of Jesus is further accentuated by these words: "I came that they may have life and have it more abundantly". Jesus offers us abundant life through his compassionate love that was fully demonstrated by his death on the cross. Jesus offers us abundant life by giving us a personal and intimate experience of God. Jesus offers us abundant life by opening the way to the Father. Therefore, in Jesus we have no restrictions, we have no fear, and we have no burdens to carry. As Jesus says we can "come in and go out and find pasture". As his disciples and friends, we are always under the loving embrace of Jesus. Our life and the outcome of our life are in the gentle hands of Jesus.

May the Eucharistic celebration give us the strength to listen to the voice of Jesus and to follow the path of Jesus. Amen!

Good Shepherd Sunday, 3rd May 2020-Fourth Sunday of Easter

World Day of Prayer for Vocations to the Priesthood and Religious Life

Celebrant: Sisters and brothers, Jesus revealed as the Good Shepherd is the one in whose wounds we have been healed, and who is the guardian of our souls.

1. For Pope Francis and the whole Catholic Church, that as we pray the Rosary of Mary in our homes during this month of May, we ask that, through Christ, our broken and fearful world will be healed. [We pray to the Lord](#)

2. For our Bishop John Stowe, priests, deacons and religious who are giving dedicated nursing and pastoral care to the sick at this time, that they may be an inspiration for youths and young adults considering their vocation in life. [We pray to the Lord](#)

3. For the Church across the world on this Vocations Sunday, that in those places where the service of priest and deacons and the witness of the religious is sparse, the Holy Spirit will call forth new vocations. [We pray to the Lord](#)

4. For those places where war and violence and religious persecution continues, that responding to the appeal of the General Secretary of the United Nations, Pope Francis and other religious leaders, there may be a cease fire in every place, giving hope for peace. [We pray to the Lord](#)

5. For the many priests and religious who have died in this coronavirus pandemic, that they will pass through Jesus, the Gate of the Sheepfold and have life to the full. [We pray to the Lord](#)

Celebrant: Let us pray in the words, which faith leaders offered in Jerusalem last week: God of the first and of the last, God of all Creatures, Lord of all generations, He arouses those who sleep and awakens those who slumber, He heals the sick, opens the eyes of the blind and raises those who are bowed down. We come before you with a bowed head, and with bent stature, and plead. Until now, Your mercy has aided us and Your kindness has not abandoned us, therefore we plead and request before You to heal us, Lord and we will be healed, save us and we will be saved, for You are our glory. We ask this through Christ our Lord.