

Fourth Sunday of Easter C/2007

We live in a culture where we are pushed to believe that life can be but a joyful experience. The commercials on television try to convince us that it will be so if we buy what they propose to sell us. The partisans of "Your happiness right now", so as not to be outdone, propose receipts to fix all our problems right now like with a magic wand.

In spite of all these teachings and proposals, we know that life is not always that mild nor is the experience that soft. Even if we love our work and consecrate all our time to it in order to succeed, there is no job that does not have unpleasant aspects. Life is demanding and loyalty to our commitments requires sacrifice.

Today's readings invite us to reflect on those times when life seems to be anything but a joyous experience, when Christians have to undergo disappointment, rejection and trials. They also provide us with resources which can help us persevere under the guidance of Jesus, the good shepherd.

The Acts of the Apostles give an account of the first missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas where they had a joyful experience of making many converts, but also that of facing rejection and opposition. The reluctance of the Jews of Pisidia to accept the good news brought by Paul and his companion is characteristic of the hardness of the human heart when confronted with the change of life that God requests. When we do not let our heart open to the word of God, it is hard to change. The price of eternal life comes out of conversion of heart and change..

The rejection of Paul and Barnabas teaches us also that life is never a continuous success story. When things do not go your way, think of Paul and Barnabas and be steadfast and persevere. However, we should not forget that God guides us in a mysterious way, even through unsuccessful work, to achieve unexpected results. This truth is evidenced by the fact that it was through the Jewish rejection of Jesus that his word spread throughout the gentile lands.

We should remember also that, though persecuted, Paul and Barnabas could not but be filled with joy and the Holy Spirit. As paradoxical as it might be, this is a sign that joy and tears can go together, as well as with unfulfilled hopes and sorrow for suffering injustice. The reason for that is that such suffering is worthwhile because of the price it contains. Think of the suffering and sacrifice you endure, for instance, for the future of your children or the wellbeing of your family. Despite the difficulty, you accept them with joy because they are worthwhile for the happiness of your beloved ones.

The second reading of the book of Revelation shows us what reward Christians will have for the sufferings they bear for the sake of God's Kingdom. A great joy, indeed, lies before us, but we have first to go through suffering, to wash our robes in the blood of the Son of Man in order to receive it.

As a matter of fact, human life reserves us enigmas we cannot understand: Why do many innocent people suffer, are subject to violence, betrayal, deceit? Why is there so much tribulation and bitterness in earthly existence? We seek to find a reason, to know the why of all these happenings, but we fail.

The book of Revelation answers that everything will be fine. It will be fine for every single creature of those who have trusted Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, from all peoples, races, languages and nations. Those people who, in this world, went through sufferings, persecution and gave their lives for the welfare of their brothers and sisters will not be disappointed. God will wipe away every tear from the eyes of all those who, in spite of their suffering, remained faithful to him and fellow humans. They will be rejoicing and glad before him without cease. They will not hunger or thirst anymore, nor will the sun or any heat strike them.

All that will be possible, because the Lamb who is on the throne will shepherd them and lead them to the springs of life-giving water. Furthermore, what is happening to them now is what happened to Jesus himself. God can never fail to reward his faithful ones. As it was for Jesus, so will it be for his disciples.

All this helps us understand why we have to listen to Jesus, the good Shepherd, and to follow him. By using the image of shepherd when talking about him, Jesus would like to tell us that with him we are secure, and without him we are lost. Of course, we know the role of a shepherd. The shepherd is the one who walks at the head of his flock to show them the safe way to pasture and to the springs of fresh water. Jesus is that true shepherd who takes care of us and without whom we expose ourselves to countless dangers and misfortunes.

Thus, Jesus can say, “I give eternal life to my sheep, they will never perish. No one can take them out of my hand. (...) No one can take them out of the Father’s hand. As you listen to these words, remember: “When you are depressed, keep up your courage! Jesus cares. No one shall snatch you out of God’s hand unless you yourself turn away from him. Jesus knows you and your problems!”

The problem of our culture is precisely that of knowing how to listen to good people. It is easy to be deceived by charlatans. Among many speakers we listen to on the radio or see on television, how can we detect the voice of the true shepherd? For that we must train our ears! If we listen to a man barely for five minutes and then for a full year never hear him again, how can we recognize his voice in a crowd? This is what happens also with Jesus. If we listen to the Gospel only once a year, how can we learn to recognize the voice of the Lord who speaks to us and guides us in all circumstances of our life? The more we are acquainted with Jesus, the more we can recognize his voice. The more we listen to his voice, the more we become one with him and our friendship with him flourish. We ask the Lord to touch our hearts so that we are able to listen to Jesus and follow him. We ask him to make us strong and persevering so that in spite of hardships of life we may persevere in our faith. God bless you all.

Acts 13, 14. 43-52; Revelation 7, 9. 14b-17; John 10, 27-30



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