

4th Sunday of Easter A/2011

After the resurrection of Jesus, the disciples felt compelled to tell his story to all the people of Israel. For them, although the Jewish authorities have crucified Jesus, God, by raising him from the dead, has made him both Lord and Christ.

In the heart of the Jewish people, this speech was powerful enough because it showed that Jesus was not an ordinary man, but the Messiah awaited by the whole country and the one through whom salvation had to come to them. That is why, as they heard the apostles speak; they did not hesitate to react by asking what they could do.

In his response, Peter does not propose to them extraordinary things to do, but rather simple gestures which can express their deep desire to follow Christ, namely the repentance of sins, the reception of baptism and the reception of the Holy Spirit as a fruit of their conversion.

What is remarkable here is the fact that what is proposed has to do with the whole household, that is, adults and children. As Peter says, “the promise is made to you and to your children and to all those far off, whomever the Lord our God will call”.

I firmly believe that the Jews who were hearing Peter that day, without hesitation, let their children be baptized, because they understood that as they have found a way to salvation they could not leave them outside of it. If that is the case, how can some today hesitate to bring their children and babies to the sacrament of baptism?

Does it mean, however, that because we follow Jesus and put our family under his protection, we are spared from pain and suffering? Not at all; instead, we are warned that we will suffer. But in all that, God’s grace will be always with us.

Christ himself by his own suffering has given us an example to follow in his footsteps. Although he was unjustly insulted, he never retaliated; although he was falsely accused, he did not take revenge. By doing so, not only has he given us a courageous example, but he also bore our sins in his body upon the cross, so that, free from sin, we might live for righteousness. That is why by his wounds we have been healed. Without him we would have been wandering forever like sheep without a shepherd and guardian.

All that helps us understand why in the Gospel, Jesus identifies himself with a good shepherd who knows his sheep by name. As a good shepherd, Jesus is capable of risking his life for the sake of his flock that we are.

In fact, in the ancient Jewish society, one of the roles of the shepherd was to take care of the sheep and to protect them against wild animals and robbers. A good shepherd was remarkable for the particular attention he gave to his sheep, his solicitude for the welfare of the flock and his zeal for the prosperity of his cattle.

And when Jesus says “He is the good shepherd”, he means that he is someone who can do anything in order to protect us. He gave up his life on the cross in order to gather all those who were lost so that they come to eternal salvation. He is not like those who came

before him and recklessly contributed to the perdition of the people of God by letting them follow strange paths which, eventually, led them far from God.

The image of shepherd does not refer only to Jesus; it symbolizes also any role of leadership in society, in the Church and in a household. In that sense, anyone holding an office, or having some responsibility over others, is a leader. However, the experience has shown that there can be also bad leaders. That is why, in order to assume correctly the role of leadership and in the footsteps of Jesus, one should act not only for the best interest of those entrusted to him/her, but also put the best of himself/herself at the service and the growth of those he/she is responsible for. Hence this question: How good a leader are you over your workers, your household, your family, etc?

Jesus is not only a good shepherd whose voice is recognized by his sheep, but he is also the gate for the sheep. By using this word, Jesus wants to tell us that he is the door that leads to his Father. He opens the way to God and allows us to have access to him. Without him, the entrance to God becomes difficult.

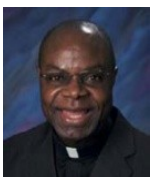
What is more is that because Jesus is the gate, he allows us full freedom of going in and coming out unharmed and safe, and finding our substantial nourishment. In that perspective, he gives us an assurance of security and protection that no one in the world can give us.

The paradox, however, is that while Jesus is the only secure door so that by entering through him we are saved, we refuse to enter through him. Meanwhile, we let a lot of people enter our own lives and mercilessly destroy us. As the experience has taught us, many people today are psychologically broken and emotionally wounded because they have let dubious people enter their lives. Jesus, who is so good and who can bless us, we never allowed to enter our lives.

And yet, Jesus has come so that we may have life and have it more abundantly. By refusing to let him enter our lives, we expose ourselves to countless dangers. In the same way, by refusing to enter through him, the secure door, we jeopardize our lives, because where we go there are predators, thieves and robbers who can only destroy us. But it means also that by putting ourselves under Jesus' umbrella, we create the conditions of vitality and superabundance of life for us.

In this Sunday of the good shepherd, let us pray that Jesus may give to his Church good leaders. May he increase vocations to the priesthood, religious life, and laity commitment! May we strive all in our vocations to be good leaders! May God bless you all!

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



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