

## Fourth Sunday of Easter A/2014

The readings of this fourth Sunday of Easter talk about the importance of leadership. They show us that Jesus is the true leader of our souls because he is the good shepherd who has given his life on the cross for us. They invite us to entrust our life to him so that he might lead us to eternal salvation.

The first reading of the Acts of the Apostles recalls Peter's speech to his countrymen. It tells the story of Jesus and attests to the event of his resurrection. It shows how Peter exhorted his compatriots with many words to repentance, the conversion of heart for the reception of the Holy Spirit and baptism for the forgiveness of sins. It shows also the reaction of the crowd of his listeners who accepted his message and let themselves be baptized.

What is behind this text is the idea that the resurrection of Jesus has awakened the sense of responsibility for the disciples to bear witness to the risen Lord. Another idea is the truth that in the aftermath of the resurrection, the teaching of the apostles has led the many Jews to conversion and to join the Church by accepting salvation through Jesus Christ.

This reading helps us understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus presents himself as the Good shepherd. First of all, Jesus says that whoever does not enter the sheepfold by the gate, but rather climbs over elsewhere is a thief. Only the shepherd of the sheep enters through the gate and the sheep recognize his voice as he calls each by name.

Then, he says that when he drives out the sheep and walks ahead of them, they follow him. However, they will not follow a stranger, because they do not recognize his voice. Instead of following him, they will rather run away. Moreover, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the normal gate is a thief and a robber. And the aim of a thief is just of stealing, slaughtering and destroying.

After that, the Gospel says that as the Jews did not realize that Jesus was talking about them, he openly declared that he was the gate for the sheep and those who came before him were thieves and robbers and the sheep did not listen to them. Therefore, whoever enters through him will be saved and have the freedom to come in and go out and find pasture. That is the reason why he came into the world, namely that the sheep may have life and have it abundantly.

What do we learn from this Gospel? Today, I want to talk about Jesus' leadership. In fact, in the Gospel, Jesus identifies himself as the shepherd of the sheep and the gate of the sheepfold.

In order to understand what Jesus means here, it is good to refer to the functioning of the ancient Jewish society. In fact, the ancient Jewish society was rural and raising livestock, in particular sheep, was very common.

In that perspective, one of the roles of the shepherd was to take care of the sheep, to protect them against wild animals and robbers, and to make sure that they were safe. A good shepherd, therefore, 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 sheepfold.

And when Jesus says he is a “good shepherd”, he means that he is someone who is capable of taking care and protecting those entrusted to him. Like a shepherd, he is capable of risking his life for the sake of the flock that the Father has given him. In that sense, his death on the cross was a supreme sign of his love for humanity that he wanted to save from perdition. Unlike those who came before him who had no interest in the welfare of the flock, he has come so that human beings may have life and have it in abundance.

Because that is the reason why he came in the world, each one of us is important to him. The consequence to draw from such an understanding is that whatever might be our past or the way people and society judge us, we count a lot for Jesus and his Father. In the same way, no one and for any reason, has the right to think that he is rejected by God, precisely because Jesus cares for us; for you and for me.

Moreover, Jesus is also the gate for the sheep. He opens the way to God and allows us to have access to him. Because he is the gate, he allows us to be truly free and to walk unharmed and safe. In that perspective, he gives us an assurance of security and protection that no one in the world can give us.

Because Jesus is our shepherd, he is the leader of our soul. If that is true, then, our human leadership is in analogy to his leadership. In fact, anyone holding responsibility like in the case of a household, a company, a business, is a leader. However, human experience has taught us that there can be also bad leaders. That is why it is important to examine our leadership at the light of Jesus’ leadership whether it is exercised for the good of those under our care or only for our personal interest and pride.

Second, Jesus is the gate for the sheep through which one can enter in order to have salvation. The irony, however, is that though Jesus is a secure door that leads to salvation, many refuse to enter through him. But, by doing so, they expose themselves to countless dangers, because where they go predators, thieves and robbers destroy their lives.

Moreover, while Jesus is the good shepherd who has the right to enter in our sheepfold, we let a lot of people enter our 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.

Let us pray that Jesus give to his Church good leaders. May he bless all mothers who have given us birth! May he increase the vocation to the priesthood, religious life, and laity commitment! May God bless you all!

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



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