

Fourth Sunday of Easter C/2016

The readings of this fourth Sunday of Easter talk about the work of evangelization and its difficulties. They invite us to realize that whatever might happen to us in the mission, Jesus is always with us and takes care of us as the good shepherd.

The first reading of the Acts of the Apostles describes the missionary work of Paul and Barnabas in the region of Antioch. It shows what they did in exhorting the converts to remain faithful to the grace of God. It also shows the effect of their teaching on the population, the counter reaction of those who opposed Jesus and their destination to the gentile lands.

What is behind this text is the idea that eternal life comes to us through the conversion of heart. Another idea is the truth that life is not a continuous successful story; therefore only those who, in spite of hardships, persevere will reap God's reward.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus presents himself as the good shepherd who takes care of his sheep. First of all, the Gospel starts with Jesus' statement that his sheep listen to his voice and follow him. Then, it affirms that Jesus gives eternal life to his sheep so that they don't perish. After that, it talks about Jesus' assurance that what is in his hand no one can take away or from the hand of his Father. The Gospel finishes with the affirmation of the unity between Jesus and the Father.

What do we learn from this Gospel? Today I want to talk about Jesus as our guarantee for eternal life. First of all, what is a guarantee? It is an assurance or an agreement by which one person undertakes to secure another in the possession or the enjoyment of something.

For instance, when we buy a new car, it comes with a guarantee. By that guarantee, we are assured that if something happens to our vehicle for a designated time and/or number of miles, we have the chance to replace it or to obtain reparation without cost. The guarantee provides us of an assurance that, under some conditions, we are safe and secure with regard to the good we possess.

When Jesus says that his sheep hear his voice, they will never perish and no one can snatch them out of his hand, he is presenting himself as our guarantor. He vouches for our spiritual integrity and our eternal life. He gives an assurance that whatever might happen to us, if we stand with him, our spiritual security is assured.

Because the guarantee works under some conditions, Jesus reminds us that we have to listen to him and follow him if we do not want to fall from his hands and to perish. This is a true challenge for us, because we live in a world where many voices exist and we always run the risk of listening to other things than those which can help us for our eternal salvation. Sometimes, we listen to the voices that kill our hearing to the point that we become deaf to the voice of Jesus. Sometimes, we follow easily other masters than Jesus who can lead us to the Father where our eternal salvation is guaranteed.

That Jesus is our guarantor for eternal salvation and nobody can take anything from his hand does not mean that nothing bad can happen to us. That would be a very optimistic and not realistic interpretation of the words of Jesus. In truth, what it means is that whatever might happen to us, be it good or bad, we will never be crushed down and we

will never be alone. In that sense, as long as we listen to Jesus and follow him, our eternal salvation is guaranteed and our spiritual safety is assured.

Is Jesus playing this role alone and by himself? No; he does it with his Father because the Father and he are one. That is the reason why Jesus says that the Father who has given him the sheep is greater than all, and no one can take them from his hand. By saying that, Jesus shows clearly that he lives in unity with his Father to the point that what he wants is also wanted by his Father. The assurance about eternal life he offers is also given by his Father.

In that perspective, we understand that Jesus does not live in isolation, but rather in unity with the Father. In the same way, he does not act on his own, but rather in union with the Father. He draws his glory from the Father and through his actions he gives glory back to the Father. There is nothing that Jesus does independently, but always in union with the Father.

Such a vision has some consequences for our life as disciples. First, as Jesus and the Father are one, we too should also live in unity with him and with the Father. If for some reason or another, we do not maintain a relationship of unity with the Father and Jesus, our life falls apart. Second, as human experience has taught us, true unity presupposes a sharing in some common goals, a pursuit of same ideals and a sharing in a same vision of things. That is why, listening to Jesus, following him and putting into practice his recommendations allows us to keep unity with him. If we grow apart from Jesus and his Father, we cannot maintain a viable relationship with him.

Third, in order to make that unity complete, we should also live in unity with one another. That is why, any relationship we want to build with God, which neglects the relationship with our fellows tends to isolate us and deceive us with regard to the real motivation that should animate us when we believe in God. Our relationship with God becomes complete when it also takes into account our relationship with our fellows.

Let us pray, then, that God may help us to stay in unity with him and with one another so that his word may prosper in us. Let us listen to Jesus and follow him so that we stay in union with him and with his Father. May God bless you all!

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



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