Fourth Sunday of Easter A/2017

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 describes the speech of Peter to his countrymen. It tells the story of Jesus and attests to the event of his resurrection. It also shows how Peter exhorted his compatriots to repentance and the reception of baptism for the forgiveness of sins. Finally, it shows the reaction of his countrymen who received well his message and accepted baptism.

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 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, it reports the speech of Jesus in which he says that whoever does not enter the sheepfold by the gate, but rather climbs over elsewhere is a thief. It also reports the words of Jesus when he says that only the shepherd of the sheep enters through the gate and the sheep recognize his voice as he calls each by name.

Then, it continues with the speech of Jesus saying that when the shepherd drives out the sheep, he walks ahead of them and these follow him because they recognize his voice. It contrasts the behavior of the good shepherd with that of a stranger and thief whose aim is to steal, slaughter and destroy, and whose voice is not recognized by the sheep and from whom they run away. It also reports the words of Jesus saying that anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the normal gate is a thief and a robber.

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.

The Gospel ends up with Jesus' last remarks showing that whoever enters through him will be saved because 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, and in particular the 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. Such vision leads us to hold that whatever might be our past or the way people or society judges us, we count a lot for Jesus and his Father. In the same way, no one 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 else 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 analogous or in likeness to his leadership. In fact, anyone holding responsibility, like in the case of a household, a company, or 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 in the light of Jesus’ leadership whether it is exercised for the good of those under our care or only for our personal interest, pride and success.

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 increase the vocation to the priesthood, religious life, and laity commitment so that we have very good leaders in the Church and who work for the good of the people of God! May God bless you all!

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

Homily Date: May 07, 2017
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Contact: www.mbala.org
Document Name: 20170507homily.pdf