

Fourth Sunday of Easter B2024

As the apostles were bearing witness to the resurrection of Jesus before their compatriots, the Jews, their strong words were accompanied with signs. That is how at their intercession, the crippled man was healed at the entranceway of the temple.

For Peter, our Lord who was crucified at the order of the Jewish elders and raised by God has become the stone rejected by the builders, but made a cornerstone. Not only has God given him life back, but our Lord himself gives life to all those who invoke his name. It is in his name that the crippled man has been cured and restored to full life.

The healing of the cripple, which is only physical, is a sign of the total salvation God has in store for all peoples who believe in his Son Jesus. Because God the Father has put everything in his hands, from now on our Lord Jesus is someone to be reckoned with when it is about the salvation of the world. That is the reason why Peter says: "There is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved".

Such a statement means that there is no salvation outside the name of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the fullness of the revelation of God to the world. He is the plenitude of communication that God has established with human beings since the creation of the world. All other ways of approaching God defined in terms of world religions are just human attempts to know God, but which remain imperfect.

It does not mean, however, that Christians should pride themselves and despise other religions. On the contrary, they should appreciate, with humility of heart, any value in those religions that sounds sane and worthy of praise, knowing that the Father, in his mercy and patience, can bring them one day to the fullness of truth in Jesus Christ.

This consideration helps us understand why Jesus says in today's Gospel, "I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. These also I must lead, and they will hear my voice, and there will be one flock, one shepherd". While these words of our Lord invite us to reinforce the mission of evangelization, at the same time, they invite to tolerance and respect of those who do not share our faith. It is our Lord who will lead them and not us; it is our Lord, and him alone, who has laid down his life on the cross for his sheep. Our duty is just to bear him witness to him and tell the world that Christ is the savior.

Our Lord is not only the savior of the world; he is also the good shepherd appointed by the Father to take care of his sheep. A good shepherd is recognized by his diligence in handling the sheep, his particular concern for the herd, and the care he has in providing food, protection and medical treatment for each one of his sheep. He does not leave the sheep in wandering in time of snow, heat, rain or storms. With such a shepherd, the sheep are safe, secure and healthy.

Our Lord is that shepherd who lies down his life for our salvation. Our Lord is the fierce protector, the fighter who does not leave carelessly the sheep in the wilderness at the risk of the predators. He stands up to anybody who threatens his flock. He loves each one of his sheep with the same love. A hired man, to whom the flock does not belong, is interested only in money, salary and advantages he can draw from the sheep.

Whoever has the heart of a mercenary and hired man will stick to the minimum laid down in his contract. The one who has the heart of a true shepherd does not stop considering his rights, his duties, what the law asks of him, what agreement binds him to his master. His law is just one, namely his love for the sheep, and love knows no limits, runs risks, accepts sacrifices, and is ready to suffer for the flock. Is it not like this that we accept any sacrifice for the love of our own children?

We understand why St John insists on the love the Father has for us in sending his Son to be our shepherd and to lay down his life for us. Thanks to our Lord, we have a new dignity of spiritual birth, we share a same heritage with him and, from now on, we are truly God's children. But as far as human history is still unfolding, as far as we have not yet finished this pilgrimage on earth, the fullness of our heritage as God's children is not yet revealed.

A day will come where everything will be revealed; there will be no more barriers between God and us, no more separation between him and us. On that day "we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is". On that day the sun will shine forever on those freed from the darkness of ignorance of God and perdition. On that day the spring will last forever on those released from the winter of evil-doing and sin.

May these words of our Lord assure each one of us to hope for our eternal reward! May we entrust our life to our Lord, the good shepherd who is able to take care of us more than human beings to whom we entrust blindly our lives at our own risk do! May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ bless us all in the Holy Spirit! Amen!

Acts 4: 8-12; 1 John 3: 1-2; John 10: 11-18



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