

## Lectio Divina. Fourth Sunday of Easter. Cycle C

*Washington (USA), Sr. Monica Garcia, May 8, 2022:-* This fourth Sunday of Easter is called "*the Sunday of the Good Shepherd*". On this Sunday our faith and attention are focused on the mysterious presence of **Christ Jesus** himself, the unique and universal Shepherd of our vines.

That is why, starting from the Word of this day, the emphasis is on the pastoral mission of the whole Church and particularly, of the Pastors who, in the name of Christ, **feed and shepherd** the People of God.

We are at Easter, and we celebrate Jesus alive and risen. His saving action is still present and effective, but in a new way: through the Church that is his mystical Body. He will always be the great, good, and **beautiful Shepherd** (ὁ ποιμὴν ὁ καλὸς = *o poimen o kalos* = the **beautiful** shepherd, **good**: **Jn 10:14**)

### PREPARATION: INVOCATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful.  
And kindle in them the fire of your love.  
Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created.  
And you will renew the face of the earth.  
Lord,  
by the light of the Holy Spirit,  
you have taught the hearts of your faithful.  
In the same Spirit  
help us to relish what is right  
and always rejoice in your consolation.  
We ask this through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

### READING: WHAT DOES THE TEXT SAY?

Acts 13:14:43-52: "Know that we dedicate ourselves to the Gentiles"

So that we may see that the Word of Jesus, in the Gospel, has not remained mere words, we are offered the reading of the Acts of the Apostles. The first apostles made the *Word of God* the dynamism of their evangelizing mission. We have on stage two well-known historical figures: Paul and Barnabas, who undertook the **first missionary journey** in the world. They are missionaries and, because of their life in Christ, they are **pastors**. They bring to the world the Gospel of Jesus Christ

as the word of salvation. They want to found Christian communities of followers of the Lord throughout the world that is known to them. They reach specific peoples: *responses* are *very* different to their proclamation of salvation.

*Some* closed their hearts and rejected them, but they announced the Lord Jesus whom they love passionately, without any discouragement. They had other projects very much of their own and refused to accept God's plan that was offered to them.

*Others, the pagans*, those who had never heard of the God of the first covenant, nor of Jesus Christ, his Son, God incarnate, opened themselves eagerly, to listen to the apostles. The Revelation

These circumstances lead them to open themselves to the people who come from *paganism*. There the Word is heard with greater openness and without conditioning. The listeners of the Jewish Bible have sometimes undefeatable barriers to open themselves to the proclamation. Those Churches that they are founding are small flocks of the one and great Church animated through them by the great Shepherd, *the Mayoral* (**1 Pet.** 5,4). The word of the Gospel is becoming a reality in the world.

And just as Christ, by fulfilling the plan and will of God the Father that he had embraced, was brought to death, the apostles had to endure persecution. The first baptized people from paganism saw them move forward but were left with the immense richness of *faith and the Holy Spirit*. It was worth the journey, the privations, the fatigues, and the persecutions. God was born into the world for all times. The centuries will pass and the culmination of which the Apocalypse speaks to us will come: the eternal feast of the elect within the great mystery of God triumphant and savior: The Church.

## GOSPEL

Jn10: 27-30:

<sup>27</sup> My sheep *hear* my voice; I *know* them, and they *follow me*. <sup>28</sup> I give them eternal life and they will never perish, and *no one will snatch them from my hand*. <sup>29</sup> The Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one can snatch anything from the father's hand. <sup>30</sup> *I and the father are one*.

## STUDY OF THE TEXT

### a) Context

God has called us to a bond of a Covenant with Him, which implies knowledge, love, listening, following, commitment and surrender. The Gospel teaches us through the image of the shepherd and the sheep.

## b) Commentary:

### v. 27

When the Gospel of St. John was written, about 70 years have passed since the death and resurrection of the Lord. But his voice is alive and urgent in our midst as if we feel and hear it today. There is a **close relationship** between the shepherd and the sheep. Life makes them close: "Listen to my voice... I know them... they follow me." These images do not belong to our daily culture but adequately illustrate what are the attitudes by which God relates to us and we to God. Without the shepherd, the sheep are lost and will perish. Without the sheep, the shepherd's life would be empty and meaningless.

We easily understand that, when Jesus speaks of "*flock*" and "*sheep*," He is not referring to what the shepherds of his time had. He uses the comparison, image, to refer to his disciples, of that moment and of all times. It is we who have believed in Him and have entrusted Him with our lives and our destiny.

"**My sheep**": That adjective, **my**, contains a whole load of affection, of concern, of belonging. He **feels them as his own** as if they have ceased to belong to him and have given him his own being. In the Old Testament God, Himself spoke of *His sheep*: "*I will deliver my flock from their mouths so it will not become their food*" (**Ez.34**: 10c). Now it is Christ who assumes that responsibility and that duty. In this way, this simple possessive adjective reveals to us his **intimate union with the Father** in the divine being.

### What do the sheep do?

"**They hear my voice.**" Of course, the one who takes the initiative is the Shepherd, Jesus. He has called them, one by one, with his name, and so they "**listen**" to him and then "**follow**" him. By calling and inviting them, he has revealed to them his project of love.

"**They follow me**": The sheep, who have listened to the Shepherd, have set in motion towards him and undertake the long **journey** with him, a march towards their destination. Listening is more than just hearing. Only when he who has received a word, has kept it in his heart and has done what was asked of him, has he really heard. It is confused with a "**filial, prompt, exact and perfect** obedience" (St. John Eudes). Following is more than a slow, lazy walk behind someone. Only the one who has endorsed the proposal of the one who has invited him and has committed himself to it completely, forever, can be said to **follow** the one who has invited him. He who "**follows**" becomes, for that very reason, "**disciple**".

## What does the Shepherd, Jesus, the Lord, do for his sheep?

**"I know them...":** *Knowing*, in the Bible does not mean only, that superficially of distinguishing someone. **"You have probed me, you know me,"** the psalmist said to the Lord (Ps. 139). God knows us and penetrates us to the depths of ourselves, **"to the bowels and the heart,"** says the Word of God. *That knowing is intimately linked to love.* God loves and knows *those* He calls. It is the committed love of God who creates man and associates him with his destiny. Knowing and loving are inseparably united in the heart of God.

He knows us and loves us so much that he has given us his beloved Son, Jesus Christ (Jn. 3:16). My response must be *to love Him*, as He Himself tells me as: *above all things*. But He is inseparable from man. He wants to be loved also in man. That love of God comes to me through Jesus Christ, through his face of God and man. His love is personal. St. Paul, a great witness of that love, tells me: *He loved me and gave himself for me* (Gal. 2:20). Let us underline that strongly expressed pronoun, **me**.

v. 28:

### "I give you eternal life."

All this is possible based on our experience of God, which Jesus tells us in the Gospel: The Incarnation means, *"I give you eternal life... no one will snatch them from my hand..."* He has come into the world with the mission to take along and integrate us into his life and his mystery, to *God the Father*.

In fact, it is God Himself who gives Himself. *Eternal life* is inseparable from its very *divine being*. He has nothing to give us. By welcoming us and sharing his life with us, he is giving us the most endearing part of his mystery. The Son has fulfilled that mission. It has opened the way for us.

He is the totality, without fissures. That is why he can assure us by his own that we **"will not perish and no one can snatch them from his hand"**. He commits to us his very omnipotence and boundless goodness. It is the perfect and total response to our thirst for eternity, for complete happiness. Everything perishable and spoils our joy is eliminated.

v.29:

In this experience of God, there is a **gift** and there is **commitment**: *"The Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all... »*. If not, it will remain in vain words, in illusions

without reality. This is what the image of the Shepherd, of the sheep, which is the invitation to an *incessant walk*, of the love that unites the Shepherd with the sheep in a definitive way, means to us: "... *and no one can snatch anything from the hand of the Father.*"

### v. 30

Giving **eternal Life** is the *raison d'être* of the **Incarnation**, of the entrance of his Son into the world. All this is possible because he lives in total unity with his Father God: "***I and the Father are one.***"

### MEDITATION: WHAT DOES THIS TEXT TELL US?

**Listen**, this is the first thing that is asked of us. God's voice is heard through *signs* that we must discover. The first is the *Word of God*. We have it in the Bible. It is in our house or in community and is not just another book on our table, but what it is according to its name: *the Book*. As we open it with veneration let us say: This Book contains God's words to me. He is telling me who He is and what He wants from me and all of humanity. It illuminates my life and reveals to me the full meaning it has. Why am I in the world and why God has called me to life? If I go to the temple and hear the Word of God, proclaimed to us at celebrations and then I don't remember it being read, I haven't heard. I have not lovingly kept God's Word for myself in the depths of my heart and in myself.

**Follow**, God invites me to a journey that has as its starting point my entry into the world and its termination in God Himself. Every walk has a path, a guide, an attraction that energizes our walking. Jesus, the Lord, is the one who guides our walking and leads us safely. He wants us to follow him, to put our feet on the footprints he leaves on the road (Lk 14:25-27), often bloody traces. For us, it must be *impossible to know him and not follow him* as perhaps we have sung.

This word of God gives rise to all the pastoral activity of this call to communicate to men and women, this word of hope and to carry out actions that give him visibility in the world as a commitment for a life forever. That offering of the Lord does not die with Christ but lives through the Church where he performs his saving action today.

We all carry today the pastoral burden of the Church, each one within the context in which we must live. It is Jesus the Shepherd who wants to continue speaking and announcing to the world the mystery of God's saving plan through us, the baptized. The Church will be active and evangelizing to the extent that we all assume, this mission with courage and joy. The Lord has placed this task on us and trusts that we will carry it to completion. His love, his power, his saving strength will not be lacking. He has assured us ***that no one can take them***

*out of his hand.* Let us place in him all our confidence and our trust as witnesses of his Gospel.

## **PRAYER: WHAT DO WE SAY TO GOD?**

*Blessed are you, living God, **SHEPHERD** of the whole universe,  
that you direct heaven and earth  
and guide human beings to **LIGHT** and **TRUTH**.*

*You did wonders in your Son Jesus Christ.  
You did not deny him your hand when we denied him our faith.  
You were with Him in his battles, and in the hour of his triumph;  
You raised Him from the dead and communicated your life to him.*

*Your Son Jesus has been obedient to your will,  
so that he would be **PASTOR** until death.  
As a **GOOD SHEPHERD**, he has died to defend his flock.  
and, after his Paschal triumph,  
offer us again your knowledge,  
the road, the real food, and life.*

*Remember the pastors of your Church:  
may they manifest themselves faithful in faith and charity.  
To You, Father, through Jesus Christ the Good Shepherd,  
and through the Spirit,  
all praise, blessing, and glory,  
for centuries of ages.  
**AMEN.***

## **CONTEMPLATION: HOW DO WE COMMIT TO THE WORD?**

The Word of God must always question us in our personal and social reality. We have been called by God to a special relationship with him and with others from our vocation as Christians. God's Word tells us that such a relationship is impossible if there is no clear link between God and us, between our neighbor and us. It is done through those elements that relate to us, the first of them the word. God speaks to us today. Let us not look for mysterious voices. Let us open the Bible and read it as the Word address to us, as a letter that comes to us from a loved one, written for us.

Let us *learn to listen to God*, let us recognize His voice as He knows ours. Let us delve into the never-ending *knowledge* of God and his Son Jesus Christ. And let's commit to a *loyal* and committed following. Sometimes there are leaders who captivate us and we follow them, in the world of politics, sports, the economy, and so on. The first one we have to follow confidently, without fear of being deceived or defrauded, is the Lord Jesus. He conditions our other follow-ups that we sometimes consider necessary.

Between the Shepherd and the sheep, there is a task to be done. God calls us to build with Him, as the main architect, the world where we live according to His plan: a world where love is felt and where hope is never lacking. And on this Sunday let us pray that there will always be countless evangelizers of the Lord.

**The affirmations made by the Pastor is related to  
three points of view with the Messiah:**

- *Mutual knowledge: the sheep do not follow a stranger;*
- *Gift of eternal life: this is how salvation is proclaimed;*
- *Union with the Father: it is the answer to the question of whether he was the Messiah.*