

4TH SUNDAY OF EASTER “I GIVE MY SHEEP ETERNAL LIFE”

Jesus always described Himself as the good Shepherd who leads His flock to green pastures. He is the shepherd described by the Psalmist in Psalm 23, because He and the Father are one, as the gospel tells us.

Who are His sheep? The Israelites were the chosen race, and so they were the sheep that the Psalmist was talking about. But through Jesus all the baptized are His sheep; “we are His people, the sheep of His flock”. This is what John saw in his vision; the great multitude he saw was from every nation, race, people, and tongue. This means all people in every corner of the world are called to be part of His kingdom; a kingdom which no one nation can claim for its own.

However, it is those who hear His voice and follow Him who qualify to be among the sheep of His flock. It is those who are ready to undergo suffering for His sake. The lives of Paul and Barnabas tell us what it is to be the sheep of Christ. They were persecuted by the Jews, but they were “filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit”.

Even though following Jesus, the good Shepherd, entails persecution and suffering, the reward is greater than the suffering. This is what John described in his vision. The multitude who “survived the great distress will not hunger or thirst anymore, nor will the sun or any heat strike them. The Lamb will shepherd them and lead them to springs of life giving water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes”.

Jesus had already told the Jews that He gives His sheep eternal life and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them from His hand. The Psalmist knew that and was convinced of God’s protection, so he said, “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want...Even though I walk in the dark valley I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and

your staff - they comfort me... Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long," (Ps.23:1,4,6).

Am I following the good Shepherd, or a false one? Do I hear the voice of Jesus and follow Him? What encourages me to be with Him always? At this present time there seems to be nothing attractive to be a Christian. The atmosphere appears to be surrounded by scorn and shame. Nothing seems to be worthwhile to be associated with Jesus. Everything appears to be gloomy. Many people today are not different from the Jews Paul and Barnabas preached to at their time. People are rejecting the word of God as the Jews rejected it when they heard it from Paul and Barnabas. Very few accept the message like the Gentiles. They accepted it; they were delighted and they glorified the word of the Lord.

Thus, today's readings should give me hope and confidence that there is light at the end of the tunnel. There is joy and happiness awaiting those who will wash their clothes in the blood of the Lamb; those who are ready to be stoned like Stephen, imprisoned like Peter and John, beheaded like James, and slaughtered like Charles Lwanga and his companions.

Even though many people seem to follow Jesus, His voice is not what we hear. We are indifferent to His voice. We have a lukewarm attitude to His message. But He warns us that such people will not see the daylight. This is His message to the Church in Laodicea: "I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth. For you say, 'I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing. You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked,'" (Rev.3:15-17).

Jesus gives His sheep eternal life and the vision of John is a testimony to that. Jesus said: "To the one who conquers I will give a place with me in my throne, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on His throne," Rev.3:21). So I have to conquer the self of its bad habits, the world, and the evil one, if we want to have life eternal.