

4th Sunday of Easter, Good Shepherd Sunday, May 03, 2020. John 10:1-10.

My dear brothers and sisters a young pastor was teaching Psalm 23 to Sunday School children. He taught them that you are all sheep and you need guidance. After teaching for a while, the pastor asked the students a question. Who is sheep and who is shepherd? The young boy put up his hand and said, we are all sheep and Jesus is our shepherd. The pastor asked again a question, who do you think I am. The other boy put up his hand and said, you are a sheepdog.

Dear friends today we celebrate Good Shepherd Sunday. In the O.T the image of God and the prophets are often used as the Shepherd. The Book of Exodus depicts God as a good shepherd leading the Israelites through the desert into the Canaan land. The book of Isaiah 40:1 says, He turns his flock like a shepherd and he gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them to his heart and leads those that are young. The prophet Ezekiel presents God as Good Shepherd who diligently searches for his lost sheep. And in Psalm 23 David praises God as a Good Shepherd. The shepherds in the O.T protected sheep from their enemies, from the wild animals, from the thieves even to the point of risking their own lives. The Palestinian shepherds knew the names of their sheep and the sheep recognize the voice of their shepherd.

The Gospel this Sunday is, indeed, good news for us. Before we totally get lost in the wilderness of this world, we hear the words of Jesus: "I am the Good Shepherd." And we are the beloved sheep of his flock. This should give us a complete sense of security: "The Lord is my shepherd. There is nothing I shall want." He takes care of us, protects us and gives us nourishment.

The image of the Good Shepherd perfectly captures the mission of Jesus. He offers his life as nourishment for his sheep. He is also ready to protect and defend his sheep from all possible harm at all cost, even to the point of risking his own life. He gives both protection and nourishment for the sheep under his care. This is better illustrated in another image Jesus used in the Gospel this Sunday. He calls himself the gate of the sheepfold. The shepherd serves as the gate. He sleeps at the entrance of the sheepfold. Nobody enters the sheepfold without his knowledge and consent. He keeps the unity of the sheep strong, as no one enters the sheepfold that does not belong to the flock. The wolves keep their distance, knowing that the shepherd is there. The sheep, therefore, are kept united and secure under the protection of the good shepherd.

However, more than the role of protection is that of nourishment, which the shepherd at the gate provides. Jesus said, "I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture...I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly" (Jn 10:9-10). He does not only lead us to green pastures. Rather, he himself is the food.

And Jesus is our shepherd and we are his flock and Jesus died as expiation for our sins. Jesus knew each of us by name and calls us by name. And Jesus speaks to us today through sacraments, through the pastors, through the word of God, through our friends and even from the events of our lives.

My dear friends we are called to be shepherds. Every one entrusted with the care of others is a shepherd. The pastors, doctors, leaders, teachers etc are called to be shepherds. Shepherd is called to be active and vigilant all the time to take care of the sheep. We become good shepherds when we take care of the sick, dying, the needy and home bound. When we use our talents, time, energy, money for the kingdom of God we become good shepherds. As members of Christ's flock, we should feel secure since through these human shepherds, Jesus continues his mission of protecting, caring and nourishing his people until he comes again. So my dear friends let us surrender ourselves to God and become good sheep and be good shepherds by following in the footsteps of our Good Shepherd Jesus Christ.