

4th Sunday of Easter (B)  
(Acts 4:8-12 / John 10:11-18)  
22.04.2018  
Good Shepherd Sunday  
World Day of Prayer for Vocations

Dear brothers and sisters,

Liturgically, Easter day lasts fifty days. Right up until the feast of Pentecost, we continue to celebrate Easter, the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead. On the fourth Sunday of Easter, the liturgy invites us to look at the Risen Lord as the Good Shepherd. The well-known image of the Good Shepherd used by Jesus in regard to himself is presented to us in the chapter 10 of St John's gospel. Herein Jesus appears as the Good Shepherd. The Risen Lord is our Good Shepherd: a good shepherd for each one of us.

Jesus says: "I am the Good Shepherd". "**I know my own and my own know me**". These are amazing words if we pay heed to them.

**"I know my own"**. The Risen Lord knows each one of us personally. He knows our joys, our sorrows, our trials. More than that, He is interested in our joys, sorrows and trials. The Risen Lord knows our pains and fears. He knows the anger which dwells within us and paralyses us. He knows the secret of our heart about which we have never spoken to anybody. He knows our depression. He knows our loneliness

Dear brothers and sisters, there is someone who knows us and loves us through and through. The Risen Lord knows each one of us better than we know ourselves. If the Lord knows us, it is the proof that we are worth knowing, that we are lovable, worth being loved. The Good shepherd respects us and cares for us. He protects us and guides us on the right path. The good news is that we are known and loved by the Risen Lord, our Good Shepherd who "**laid down his life for us**".

**"I know my own and my own know me"**. We know the Risen Lord. We know the Risen Lord, our Good Shepherd. When we say that we know the Lord, what do we mean? We don't mean that we are able to say in a few words who He is, to label or define Him, to make him fall into a category. Our Lord is not an idol. He is alive, fully alive. To know Him is to seek Him, to find Him and to seek Him again. At each step, we discover a new facet of the Lord, -indeed, we are always seeking new facets of Him in the hope that one day we shall get the full picture. To search for the Lord, to seek his face is the way to know the Lord without ever possessing Him or controlling Him, because He is always greater than what we know of Him. Our main goal in life is to seek the Lord again and again. Seeking the Lord, knowing Him is – to use words of St Gregory of Nyssa – "going from beginning to beginning through beginnings that have no end".

To know our Good Shepherd is to listen to his voice, like sheep who recognize the shepherd's voice, listen to him, and follow him.

The relationship, the intimacy between the shepherd and his sheep is something similar to the relationship between the Father and the Son at the heart of the Trinity: “I am the Good Shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, **just as the Father knows me and I know the Father**”.

On this fourth Sunday of Easter, the Church invites us to pray for vocations. When we hear the word “vocation”, immediately we think of vocation to priesthood, or vocation to religious or monastic life, and this is true and important. But the Church also wants us to think of vocation in a wider sense: each one’s vocation in life. We all have a vocation and a mission. The difficulty for us is to identify our vocation in order to respond to it. Our vocation in life is our deepest desire put within our hearts by the Lord himself. We shall find it if we pray, allowing the Lord to know us in truth, seeking the Lord, and longing to know and do his will over and over again as we journey through life. In that place of intimacy with our Good Shepherd which is prayer, we cannot but discover God’s call to enjoy the happiness he has prepared for us and also receive the courage to give answer to it. Let us not be afraid to respond to the Lord. The Lord is with us; He takes care of us and wants our happiness.

Let us come back to today’s gospel passage. “**There are other sheep I have that are not of this fold**, and these I have to lead as well. They too will listen to my voice, and there will be only one flock and one shepherd”.

Who are these sheep which are not of this fold? There is a relatively recent way of understanding this verse in an ecumenical perspective. The other sheep are Christians of other denominations. But it is clear that the evangelist St John and the Christians of the first century did not understand this verse in that perspective because there were not different denominations among Christians at the time. Then, the idea of a Church, the only holder of the whole truth, a Church without need of reform, one to which all the others should rally unconditionally is more than questionable...

In fact, these other sheep are those who do not yet know Christ, but who nevertheless were created out of love by God in Christ. Jesus is the only name given to all people by which they can be saved. Christians of other denominations have already received the name. They are already one flock, in a unity which goes deeper than and beyond all divergences. The divergences between Christians are often serious and should be a matter of reflection for all denominations, our own included. But it remains that the good news is offered to all. Christ has at heart and for mission to bring all human beings into the one fold. We should make Christ’s desire our own in our prayer.

The Risen Lord is our Good shepherd, the Good shepherd of all Christians, the Good Shepherd of all men and women of good will who seek the Lord with a sincere heart. May we follow Him wholeheartedly!