

## Homily of Fourth Sunday of Easter Year C

Today is Good Shepherd Sunday. The first reading narrates the experience of two great shepherds in the early Church, Paul and Barnabas. At that time, their work of evangelization was very successful. "Many Jews and worshippers who were converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas... When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and with violent abuse contradicted what Paul said." The Jews, further, "incited the women of prominence who were worshippers and the leading men of the city, stirred up a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their territory." Even now, some shepherds have the same experience. Let such shepherds be strengthened by the experience of Paul and Barnabas, and also follow the footsteps of Paul and Barnabas when it becomes necessary. "So they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them, and went to Iconium. The disciples were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit." This is important because, sometimes, some shepherds, unwisely, think that shaking off dust from their feet and going somewhere else is a sign of weakness and a sign of accepting defeat. Jesus says, "When they persecute you in one place, flee to another. Truly I tell you, you will not finish going through the towns of Israel till the Son of Man comes" (Matthew 10:23).

It is helpful to pay a little more attention to this line in the first reading, "When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and with violent abuse contradicted what Paul said." Jealousy is an unhappy feeling of wanting to have what someone else has. It is a feeling of resentment against a rival or against a person enjoying success or advantage. Jealousy is a dangerous spiritual disease. It soaks up joy and peace, and leaves whomever it possesses downcast. It blinds whom it possesses from seeing the beautiful work of God. It poisons the mind and body, and weaponizes whom it possesses to inflict harm on its target. It is Satan's dangerous weapon of destruction and murder. Let us flee from this spiritual disease.

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, says in the Gospel, "My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. No one can take them out of my hand." Jesus speaks to us every day through words in the Scripture. His words are Spirit and life (John 6:63). If we listen to his voice, and do what his words say, we will remain in his protection and not perish. The Evil One speaks to us too. His voice opposes and contradicts the voice of Jesus. He is jealous of Jesus. His voice aims at taking us out of Jesus' hand that we may perish. St. James advises us, "Submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you" (James 4:7-8).

As we celebrate Good Shepherd Sunday, let us call to mind Pope Francis' appeal in 2013 to priests and the faithful. To priests he says,

***This is what I am asking you, be shepherds with the smell of sheep, so that people can sense the priest is not just concerned with his own congregation, but is also a fisher of men.***

***A good priest anoints his people with the oil of gladness, by preaching the Gospel with unction, that is with the soothing, comforting words of God.***

***If people leave Mass looking as if they have heard good news, then the priest has clearly done his job well.***

To the faithful he says,

***Be close to your priests with affection and with your prayers, that they may always be shepherds according to God's heart.***

### **Prayer for Priests by St. Therese of Lisieux**

O Jesus, eternal Priest,  
keep your priests within the shelter of Your Sacred Heart,  
where none may touch them.  
Keep unstained their anointed hands,  
which daily touch Your Sacred Body.  
Keep unsullied their lips,  
daily purpled with your Precious Blood.  
Keep pure and unearthly their hearts,  
sealed with the sublime mark of the priesthood.  
Let Your holy love surround them  
and shield them from the world's contagion.  
Bless their labors with abundant fruit  
and may the souls to whom they minister  
be their joy and consolation here and in heaven  
their beautiful and everlasting crown. Amen.