

Homily of Fourth Sunday of Easter Year C, 2022

Acts 13:14, 43-52; Psalms 100:1-3, 5; Revelation 7:9, 14b-17; John 10:27-30

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 of rejection and expulsion. 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). Let shepherds be filled with joy and the Holy Spirit and be guided by the word of God.

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 drains up joy and peace, and leaves whomever it possesses downcast. It causes spiritual blindness to whom it possesses, and prevents the person from seeing God's beautiful work in other people. 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 today's 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 the Scripture. If we listen to the Scripture and do what the Scripture says, we will receive eternal life and not perish. The Evil One speaks to us too and tries to lead us astray. We pray for the grace not to listen to the Evil One but listen to Jesus, the Good Shepherd. 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).

We also pray for the grace of good and attentive listening. Good and attentive listening means setting aside our own agendas, pay attention, hear and take in what is being said. We may not like what we are hearing. But it is important to listen since God does not appear physically to speak to us. Many times, God speaks to us through our fellow human beings. But often, our own agendas block our listening. Listening has become increasingly a difficult task for men and women of our generation due to so much noise and distractions. Philosopher Epictetus says, "We have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak." We pray for good and attentive listening between the priests and the faithful.

As we celebrate Good Shepherd Sunday, let us call to mind Pope Francis' appeal to priests and the faithful in 2013. 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 Pope Francis says, "Be close to your priests with affection and with your prayers, that they may always be shepherds according to God's heart." Indeed, it is very important that the faithful pray for the priests because it is a more difficult task to care for the spiritual needs of the faithful.

Finally, priests are not the only shepherds. Everyone is a shepherd wherever the person has a responsibility. Let us all imitate Jesus and be good shepherds in our various responsibilities.

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