

REFLECTION for the FOURTH SUNDAY of EASTER

The fourth Sunday of Easter is considered “Good Shepherd Sunday,” because every year on this Sunday we are invited to listen to a passage from chapter 10 of the Gospel according to John, in which Jesus is presented as the Good Shepherd. This is therefore the central theme that the Word of God puts before us today.

The first reading, from the Acts of the Apostles, describes the missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas through the lands of Asia Minor, in present-day Turkey. Having been sent by the community of Antioch, these two apostles dedicated themselves heart and soul to proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, who gave his life for his sheep. Today we find them in Antioch of Pisidia [pigh-sid-E-ah]. Here they are present in the synagogue on the Sabbath, attempting to show that Jesus Christ is the Messiah that God's people have so long waited. A large crowd gathered to hear them, which aroused the envy of the Jews of the Synagogue, who responded with blasphemy to Paul's announcement.

We have two types of people there: on the one hand, those who, settled in their certainties, refuse to listen to the Good News of salvation that the Apostles announce. On the other hand, those who open their hearts to this Good News, converting to Christ, recognizing him as the Good Shepherd who guides us, protects us and cares for us, as our Savior. *Which group do we belong to?* Are we also ready to listen to the Word of God and let ourselves be transformed by Jesus Christ? To follow him, loving him in our brothers and sisters, making him our light, the truth, the way, and the life?

The second reading, taken from the Book of Revelation, shows us Jesus' final reunion with his sheep, those sheep who listened to his voice and followed him, overcoming injustice, violence, and death. These people are an immense multitude of languages, peoples and nations, representatives of the universal church. At the end of our journey on earth, all of us, the sheep of Christ's flock, will be clothed in glory. With Christ we will live forever in eternal dwellings. This is our hope, that which comes from faith in the one who has already conquered death itself and now lives forever with the Father. *To him be praise and glory forever!*

The Gospel, taken from the tenth chapter of Saint John, presents Christ as the good and true Shepherd, who loves his sheep and knows each one by name. Those who want to be part of Jesus' flock must listen to his instructions, accept his proposals and be ready to follow him. Jesus will lead them where there is true life, and he will never allow his sheep - the sheep he loves so much - to be taken from him. He is

one with the Father. He is God who came to us and gave his life for us, so that in him we might have life and life in abundance.

Those who listen to his voice and follow him are part of Jesus' flock. The verb "to listen" does not just imply "hearing with your ears" the words that have been spoken; it indicates welcoming and keeping in your heart the proposals that Jesus makes. The verb "to follow" implies taking on Jesus' way of life, becoming a disciple, letting oneself be guided by Jesus, and following him on the path of love and the gift of life. Those who listen to Jesus' voice, accept his proposals, and follow him are united to Jesus in a special way. Jesus gives them true and definitive life: *"I give them eternal life, and they will never perish."* As the Good Shepherd, Jesus recreates them, enlivens them, cares for them, protects them, defends them, and leads them to green pastures; and to springs from which flows the water that quenches their thirst for life. They will never be lost, because the life that Jesus gives them overcomes the power of death itself. Nothing will keep them from Jesus' love.

Let us be the Lord's sheep. May Jesus truly be our Good Shepherd and send us good shepherds to care for the Lord's flock, protect them, and lead them to the springs of living water promised by Jesus Christ.

Let us pray in a special way for our Pope Leo XIV, who has just been chosen to succeed our dear Pope Francis. May God enlighten him and may he be the holy and dedicated shepherd that God's Church needs.

Amen.