

My dear friends, the fourth Sunday of Easter is traditionally called **the Good Shepherd Sunday**. The readings employ the images of sheep and shepherd to explore the relationship between Jesus and the Church. The Gospel, today, highlights the gift of eternal life given to the sheep, and establishes the connection between the sheep, Jesus, the Good Shepherd, and God the Father. We think of the '**pastoral' love of God**, as we also pray for vocations, especially vocations to priesthood; priests are the 'pastors' of the Church. Each year, for the Gospel reading, we hear one part of John 10. This year, being Year C, we listen to the third part of that chapter. Today, Jesus says, "**I know them and they know me; and I give them eternal life**" (Jn. 10:28).

The good shepherd is the one who really takes his job seriously, who will ensure that nothing happens to his flock, even if he has to put his own life in danger. He will be the one that will fight the wolf who is attacking the flock, even if it puts his own life at risk. Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd in John. He is willing to die for his flock, his followers. Not just this flock, but he says there are other sheep out there, and he must gather them, and bring them into the protectiveness of his flock, until there is only one shepherd and one flock. The other sheep he is referring to **are the Gentiles, and his present flock are the Jews**.

In today's first and second reading, we see the need to persevere in our role as Christians and pastors in difficult moments. Paul and Barnabas have some mixed feelings in their missionary apostolate. While they have a joyful experience of making converts, their fellow Jews made life difficult for them by persecuting Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:50). In the same vein, the writer of the Book of Revelation tries to encourage his fellow Christians, who are about to give up. He urges them to stand firm with their faith as we hear the elder's explanation: "these are the ones who have survived the time of great distress; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Rev.7:14). St. John Chrysostom opines that, the early Christians drew their strength from two virtues- **perseverance and fellowship**. These virtues should be an important element in the life of Christians of all ages. It is in this fraternal charity and fellowship that evangelist John admonished Christians in the midst of uncertainty to have **faith**, because, the victory that conquers the world is our **faith** (1Jn.5:4).

Furthermore, Jesus said I will give them Eternal Life (Jn. 10:28), the good shepherd not only guides, protects and leads the sheep to safe pasture but also promises eternal life to all His followers. Jesus goes on to say that if the sheep stay united to the Good Shepherd nothing and no one can snatch Christ's sheep from him, because our Father, God, is stronger than the Evil One (Jn.10:29). Our hope that God will grant us final perseverance is not based on our strength but on God's mercy: this hope should always motivate us to strive to respond to grace and to be ever more faithful to the demands of our faith. Jesus knows our problems, and the difficulties also serve as a chance for us to prove our love and faithfulness to God. Therefore, let us persevere till the end and victory will be ours.

Finally, brothers and sisters, what can we apply to our own lives today, if we are truly following the wishes of Jesus, in regards to the readings? Although Jesus has promised us eternal life, we must persevere in difficult moments and trials. Christians are being advised to remain faithful till the end, because the multitude who have already survived the ordeal are in heaven. The saints serve as signs of encouragement in our Christian life. We are called to resist sin and all temptations and the kingdom will be ours. Today as we are celebrating Vocation Sunday and Mother's Day, let us do our best to evangelize. I know that not all of us are ready to go door to door or to proclaim on street corners today. If in all our dealings, we can be a reflection of Christ, people will see it and be attracted by it. If the Spirit gives you the courage to invite others to join us, to celebrate with us, all the better. If it is through the name of Jesus that we can be saved, then we need to believe that with our whole heart and soul and act on it. May God give us his grace to know our good shepherd; to love and serve Him so that when our life on earth is over He will give us Eternal life; Amen.