



CATHOLIC CONVERSATIONS ON THE SCRIPTURES

Archdiocese of Miami - Ministry of Christian Formation

April 26, 2015

Fourth Sunday of Easter

Gospel reading John 10:11-18 *[To be read aloud]*

Jesus said: "I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. A hired man, who is not a shepherd and whose sheep are not his own, sees a wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away, and the wolf catches and scatters them. This is because he works for pay and has no concern for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I will lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. These also I must lead, and they will hear my voice, and there will be one flock, one shepherd. This is why the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own. I have power to lay it down, and power to take it up again. This command I have received from my Father."

Brief commentary:

The season of Easter fills us with joy, and the source of this joy is the indomitable love of God that comes to us in Jesus Christ. No rejection, no injustice, no crucifixion, no grave, can thwart the power of God's love. Today's readings are filled with the source of this joy: it is in the name of Jesus that the crippled are healed and it through his name that we are saved; Jesus is the cornerstone – the foundation of new life – that God has chosen, and that will stand solid forever despite all rejection. And the author of 1 John calls us to exalt joyfully with conviction, "Beloved: See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. And so we are!" And although we do experience this filial relationship with God now, the letter tells us that one day we will fully experience the dignity and glory of what that means. No wonder we can exclaim wholeheartedly with the psalmist: "I will give thanks to you, O Lord, for you have been my savior!" But perhaps no image speaks to us more profoundly, more beautifully and more intimately about God's love than that of the image of the shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep. True, Old Testament texts acclaim the Lord as the shepherd in the beautiful poetry of the twenty-third, fortieth, eighty-first, and ninety-fifth psalms, as well as other passages. But none had foreseen to what extent this divine shepherd would love his sheep. More than a shepherd who 'leads, tends to, refreshes, rescues, defends, feeds, gathers, anoints and vindicates' his sheep, the shepherd of the gospel of John is the one who 'lays down his life willingly for his sheep and takes it up again for the sake of his sheep'. The Easter season calls us over and over again to wonder at the mystery of Christ's passion and resurrection, and to center our lives in his love that saves. It is not for a crowd, a multitude, huge numbers, that Christ lays down his life, it is for each person – without exception – whom he knows and calls by name. It is for the one lost sheep – it is for you and me. Paul realized this and it changed his life: "I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me; insofar as I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me" (Galatians 2:20). (Notice Paul's emphasis on how personally he understands God's love.) Every person can profess these words of Paul; indeed, this is the core of the Christian experience of God's love in Christ. Two thousand years later, we are those who are historically beyond the original sheepfold, but who have heard his voice and belong to his one flock. This gospel also reminds us that we are called by name, we are called to respond to the voice of the shepherd above every other voice. Every Christian has to know that he/she has been baptized into Jesus Christ, not into an ideology, not into a political party, not a culture, not an earthly way of life or group: "It is no longer I, but Christ who lives in me." Today the Bishop of Rome continues to be the spokesperson of Christ's voice to the Church as a whole: in his teaching and that of the Church we hear Christ's voice that consoles and confronts, announces and denounces, inspires and challenges, guides and instructs, but especially a voice that proclaims the Good News of God's love for all sinners. Each Christian too is to be the Shepherd's voice to our families and neighborhoods, communities and parishes, workplaces and schools, in every sector of society and world. Christians suffering persecution throughout the world are suffering and laying down their lives for the one who laid down his life so lovingly for them. *Jesus, risen Lord, be their salvation, call out to us to come to their rescue! Amen!*

Today's reading offers significant messages:

- Easter is through and through the celebration of the unconquerable love of God for each person, so stunningly on display in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. The Christian is one who believes in the truest love of the One who willingly laid down his life on behalf of all. The Christian is one who has heard the grace of the Shepherd's voice and by grace is responding.
- The Successor of Saint Peter continues the ministry of Jesus' shepherding in the Church: we are to be attentive to his voice, and also be the voice of the Shepherd to the people around us. Christians are to be loyal – above everything and everyone – to Jesus Christ, the only Shepherd of the sheep.
- As the Church, founded on the love of God in Jesus Christ, we are to strive toward the unity in love the Jesus envisioned. That means that we are to 'suffer when one member of the Body suffers'. This Easter we turn especially to all who suffer, as well as to our Christian sisters and brothers persecuted throughout our world.

For our shared or personal reflection:

After a brief pause for silent reflection share your answers, ideas or feelings.

- How have I experienced the love of the Jesus the Shepherd in my life? How do I listen, and respond, to his voice?
- What can I do to learn more about the teachings of the Pope as he leads the Church in her mission to the world? How am I being Christ's voice in my world?
- How can I help build true unity in my parish and among Christians? How am I united to, and helping, persecuted Christians?

Suggested readings: Catechism of the Catholic Church paragraphs 606-618