

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER, YEAR C. Acts 13:14.43-52, Rev 7:9.14-17, John 10:27-30

Jesus describes the positive relationship that exists between him and his disciples, between him and the Father, and therefore between the disciples and the Father. Jesus is the Shepherd; he provides security for the disciples beyond the hopes of this world by giving them eternal life. The disciples are the sheep; they listen to Jesus. Jesus and the Father are one, hence, the disciples share in the life of the Father through the free gift of eternal life that Jesus bestows. Who is a shepherd: One who tends and rears sheep. It is also used for one who provides spiritual guidance for members of a church. Why did Jesus call himself a shepherd? Because Jesus cares and provides for his flocks, since he is the head of the church and we all are members, Col 1:18. A shepherd takes care of flock or herds as a general term, but to be specific, sheep are different from cattle. By its very nature, the sheep is never aggressive or violent, it is simple and said to be docile or humble in its disposition. To some people, sheep are stupid, and defenseless; meant basically for two things: to be eaten and for production of wool. The obvious truth is that sheep are quite smarter than we know. Harriet Constable said on 19th April 2017 "sheep are actually surprisingly intelligent, with impressive memory and recognition skills. They build friendships, stick up for one another in fights, and feel sad when their friends are sent to slaughter. They are also one of the most destructive creatures on the planet." Intelligent, complex and sociable can easily be aligned to humans, but not to sheep; of which they are. Now we observe clearly why Jesus Christ would use the figures of sheep as means of hearing him, knowing him, following him and being with him. Today, Vocation Sunday, challenges everyone to promote vocations. This is a gift from the Lord and so parents, guardians and friends should stop disabusing people from wanting to serve God in the priesthood and religious life. Allow those who want to serve God and who are serving God to listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd.

Paul and Barnabas in the first reading were moving from place to place proclaiming the good news and inviting people into a relationship of trust with Jesus. Through this relationship, believers receive guaranteed care and protection from the Good Shepherd, Jesus. Many rejoice at the invitation, but the leaders reject it out of pride, fear, jealousy and intolerance and incite others against the disciples. But in all this, they remain unstoppable because they were motivated by the word of Christ. As Christians, we must distance ourselves from the attitude of the Jews and be sheep that listen to the shepherds whom God has placed over us, God made us, we belong to him. We must not give in because of persecution.

Life has much tribulation and bitterness in store for everyone. Many innocent people suffer, subjected to violence, injustice, betrayal, and deceit. Most often when disasters come upon us, we seek to find a reason, to see why all this, but we most often do not find answers. The book of Revelation tells us that there is a book where an angel records all the sufferings and tears of people, and this book contains also the reason for these absurd things taking place on earth. But the book is closed by seven seals that no man can break, the book holds the secrets and the answer to all our most grievous problems. But all hope is not lost because the lamb of God has come to redeem us. This book was written to encourage the suffering Christians to

persevere and follow Jesus the Shepherd to share in his glory. He leads them to where they will experience neither hunger nor thirst.

The suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus gives us access to a new and healthy relationship with God and with one another. Our relationship with God does not end here. Even when we pass from this life, Jesus who has conquered death watches over us and guides us into the eternal presence of God. What's our contribution to the relationship we have with God and others? We are all called to be good shepherds. There was this story: On All Souls Day, six young men came to a cemetery to pray. Although they were not the children of that lady in the grave, they had still etched on her tombstone, "Dear Moma." She was not their mother, but she became their mama. Here is how she became their mother: "Here is the dust of a holy woman," said the leader of the six, "who found me two years ago, a stranger both to the people of this city of Chicago and to God. She invited me to her Bible class, and though my garments were threadbare, she invited me to her home. She spoke to me about Jesus and the better life. I was constrained to give my heart to God, and to this day Jesus is mine and I am his." The second man said, "My friend and I were homeless and friendless in this city. We had heard about this lady's Bible classes, so we went and took the back seat, and we tried to hide ourselves, but the eyes of this lady missed no young man who appeared to be lonely, friendless and homeless. After the class, she approached us and questioned us about our temporal and spiritual conditions. She gave us a place to stay and slowly made us to give a place to Jesus in our lives. The fourth man said, "We have more reasons to thank this lady than any of you. Two years ago, my two friends and I were drunkards. This lady found us at the Young Men's Christian Association rooms and took us to her house. She prayed with us, she entreated for Jesus' sake, for our mothers' sake and for our own sake. She induced us to sign the pledge; placed her hands upon our heads, and offered, Oh, such prayers for us. Then and there, new strength came into our lives and from that day to this, by the grace of God, we have been able to live a sober life. Boys, I tell you, this dear woman was a mother to us. Her name is Sara Houghton Fawcett. Today, let us meditate upon the gifts of the Good Shepherd and the marks of his sheep. The love of Christ summons all of us to be shepherds with intimate relationship with Jesus by daily staying attentive to the voice of God. Do you hear Christ's voice calling you to the priesthood or religious life to be a living witness of faith that our troubles can be neutralized by trusting the voice of the good shepherd. Elders, please help the young ones to answer God call.