

MAY 8, 2022

Acts 13:14,43-52; Rev 7:9, 14b-17; Jn 10:27-30

What's this taking about sheep. There are several times in the scriptures that we hear of God as a shepherd - our Psalm today says *we are his people the flock he tends*, the 23rd psalm says *the Lord is my shepherd*, Jesus talks about himself as shepherd and us as sheep. But what does that mean?

Sheep are kind of passive animals, they will follow where they are led, and go where their shepherd tells them to go without really thinking about it. They need someone to lead them to food and water, they are very vulnerable to a lot of predators - so they need someone to protect them. It may feel funny that God is likening us to sheep. You may even be saying: "Hey, I'm no sheep"! "No one leads me around, I take care of things myself, I pick out the right things myself - no one tells what to think or believe"! But we don't have all the answers, you didn't come out of the womb knowing all you now know - or thinking the way you do. From a psychological perspective it feels that everything in our head is your own opinion - but really you have taken a lot in from outside sources and need something to build our opinions on. If it was not the case that you needed to learn from outside sources, then your parents will want back the money and time they invested in your education. Learning itself is a process of being led to answers and explanations by various voices. We do have a choice in what voices we listen to, but studies show that we tend to align our thoughts much more than we realize to the voices we pay attention to. This may come as a surprise to some, we're a lot more like sheep than we think.

Jesus says today: *My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish.* Since we are all kinda "sheep-like," Jesus is saying that His voice is the one to listen to because leads us to something very unique. There are so many voices out there, most telling you that the other voices are wrong. Even those who promote opens are very intolerant to views that are opposed to theirs. Some of you know that before I became a priest I was a therapist for many years. What I heard a lot then, and now are people stressing trying to find a magic formula to a happiness that they seek at some deep level. Many voices we can turn to for an answer are saying "Do it your own way, decide for yourself, don't let anyone tell you what to do - then you'll be happy" ... but then they tell you what to do - leading you to believe that if you pick their way then you are not letting yourself be led. But

you're always making a choice between following various voices - the question is which to follow.

Our faith tells us that following Jesus is the way to a true freedom, yet other voices in this world disparage the truth of God and wrongly say that to follow the voice of Jesus is to give up your freedom. You have the freedom to choose the voice of Jesus over other voices. You have the choice to listen to the voice of the one who made us and knows the way to true happiness and contentment. We hear in the second reading the ultimate place that this following leads: *They will not hunger or thirst anymore ... For the Lamb who is in the center of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to springs of life-giving water; and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.* You do not know how much human pain and suffering I have seen because people have put their faith in a secular voice that promised a quick path to happiness and it didn't deliver. Also I have seen people abandon their faith because they thought that Jesus is talking about a quick fix and it didn't happen - this is an immature way to think about God and faith - you have been challenged to grow into a more mature faith, one that realizes that God is realistic and wise. Jesus doesn't make promises that are designed to draw you in, with grand expectations that don't deliver. He is clear that there is a lot of suffering to come in life - you can't just eliminate that. But I will tell you that listening to His voice I get myself in less problems and make my life less uncomfortable. I and others have painfully found that plans work out better following His voice, and I am led to a contentment that I am not able to get with the worldly things such as money, sex, power, and doing whatever I want.

Many people are content to be the sheep of the Good Shepherd because He actually does provide, He actually does guide - and where he ultimately leads us is to an eternal spiritual life that no one else can deliver. You may doubt that because others have told you that there is no proof of this to satisfy them, and if you believe it you are giving up your freedom - but they are actually telling you what to believe. But I will choose to exercise my freedom to believe in God, I will choose to exercise my freedom to follow the voice of Jesus. As your life goes on you will have to continue to select which voices you follow. I pray that one thing you learn to search the faith that is here before you. We can't determine reality by what we want to believe and denial of the life to come is the most depressing prospect yet. The faith in the voice of Jesus is faith in the one who wants to shepherd you to the peace and satisfaction in that next life that you were built for, and which the world and your own exercise of freedom alone cannot give.