

Fourth Sunday Of Easter

“I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.”

-John 10:11

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ,

Today, the fourth Sunday of Easter is celebrated as the Good Shepherd Sunday. We think of the ‘Pastoral’ love of God, as we also pray for vocations to Priesthood; Priests are the ‘Pastors’ of the Church. Each year, for the Gospel reading, we hear one part of John Ch.10. This year, (being Year B), we listen to the second part of that chapter. Jesus says, “I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep” (Jn 10:11). This statement has two parts. Today, I would like to reflect on these three points from our readings.

1.) I Am The Good Shepherd

Jesus was not the first to use the image of the Shepherd. Even in civil society, the concept of the Shepherd was used among Kings and Rulers, prior to the time of Jesus. In the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament), the image of the Shepherd is used to refer to the leaders of the people of Israel. God calls Moses not only when he is tending the flock of his father-in-law (Ex 3:1), but Moses is given a Shepherd’s staff (Ex 4:2) that he was already holding, as a symbol of leadership, authority and the power of God. Again, David was not just a Shepherd boy, but when the people of all the tribes of Israel went to David at Hebron to anoint him as their King, they reminded David “And the Lord said to you: You shall Shepherd my people Israel: you shall be ruler over Israel” (2 Sam 5:1-3).

We have the Prophets again and again referring to the leaders of Israel as Shepherds; they also refer to God as the true Shepherd of the people.

- Prophet Isaiah declares, “Behold, the Lord God comes with might, and His arm rules for Him; behold, His reward is with Him, and His recompense before Him. He will feed His flock like a Shepherd, He will gather the lambs in His arms, He will carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those that are with young” (Is 40:10-11).
- And in Jeremiah, “Therefore thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning the Shepherds who care for my people: “You have scattered my flock, and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. ... I will set Shepherds over them who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be missing, says the Lord” (Jer 23: 2-4).
- In Ezekiel, the Lord God says, “I will set up over them one Shepherd, my Servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their Shepherd” (Ezek 34: 23).

So the image of the Shepherd has been there in the long tradition of Israel. And Jesus just takes on this image. But what makes Jesus’ image of the Shepherd unique and special is what we read in John 10. Jesus is not just a Good Shepherd **Jesus is The Good Shepherd** who knows His sheep: He calls them, He feeds them and He guides them. The closer we are to the Shepherd the safer we are from the wolves. We are loved, protected, healed, and fed by our Good Shepherd.

2.) The Shepherd Lays Down His Life For The Sake Of The Sheep.

In John's Gospel chapter 10 we hear these phrases again and again: I am the Good Shepherd. I lay down my life for my sheep... I lay it down of my own free will... I have the power to lay it down. These words are repeated many times. As the Good Shepherd, Jesus laid down His life for us to save us from our sins. He laid down His life for us through the Paschal mystery [Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.]

What do we obtain through this Paschal Mystery? Jesus as the Good Shepherd promised, "A thief comes only to steal and slaughter and destroy; I came so that they might have **Life** and have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).

In our first reading, St. Peter says, "There is no **Salvation** through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved" (Acts 4:12). In our second reading, St. John says, "Beloved, we are **God's Children** now, what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1John 3:2). What a marvelous promise, what an awesome promise! Through the death of Jesus on the cross (laying down His life for us). We are given life abundantly. We are saved and called to be children of God, to see Him as He is.

3.) The Challenge Is To Follow The Good Shepherd

If Jesus is our Good Shepherd, are we Good Sheep? If we are the Good Sheep of the Good Shepherd, what are our responsibilities?

- We need to understand Jesus well.
- We need to walk in the way of the Lord.
- We need to receive the food of the Lord.
- We need to live in the protection of the Lord.

- We need to listen and trust in His Word and promise.

As we are praying for the Vocations, we need Good Shepherds today in every walk of life. In our homes, we need parents who really care about their children, who spend time with them, and who still care for them even when they disappoint them. In our schools, we need teachers who know their students and who take a personal interest in their well-being. In our hospitals, we need doctors and nurses who care about their patients and who do not treat them as objects. In public life, we need people who care about the welfare of others rather than their own selfish interests. And of course, in the Church, we need Priests who are willing to give a loving service to all their brothers and sisters.

I believe that these three points that we reflected on, will help you to hear the Good Shepherd's voice today and also, help others to hear His voice through our words and actions as well. For His voice leads us to life in abundance.

The Easter season is the perfect time to move from pain and suffering to Glorious triumph in the Risen Christ. **Praise the Lord!** - Fr. Bala Kommathoti

