

## **HOMILY for 4<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY of EASTER – Year C**

In this Sunday's Gospel, Jesus says, "My sheep hear my voice. I know them, & they follow me." What He wants to do with that saying is to use it to explain to us about the relationship between the shepherd & the sheep & compare it with the one between Him & His followers. I do not know if you have grown up on a farm or ever seen the interaction between a shepherd & his sheep or not. It is a special & unique relationship. I did not know anything about that until I had a chance to experience life on a farm for a little bit in my graduate school. Some of my friends & I took a course in Rural Ministry & had to spend some weekends on a farm. We visited various farms that raised cattle & grew all sorts of agricultural products. But, what I remembered the most about that experience was to see the unique relationship between the shepherd & his sheep. On this particular farm, we saw how a farmer raised & took care of his sheep. He had a big herd of sheep, probably about a hundred of them. When we reached the sheep pen, none of them came close to us or wanted anything to do with us. Then, we were surprised to see how everything was magically transformed when the shepherd came. The moment the sheep smelled & saw the shepherd heading in their direction, they all rushed toward him without any hesitation. They felt genuinely safe & happy around him. I was amazed at that unbelievable transformation, especially the relationship between the shepherd & his sheep.

That is what Jesus wants to talk to us about in this Sunday's Gospel. His relationship with His followers can be compared to the one of the shepherd & his sheep. They hear His voice & recognize Him. But, as I shared with you about my experience on a farm above, the sheep could identify their shepherd more than just his voice. They could recognize him through smell & other senses. They know him well as if he was their best friend. But, that is what Jesus has assumed our relationship with Him would be like. We should be able to recognize His voice & identify Him with all our senses, especially our spiritual one. We should run toward Him & follow Him. Unfortunately, here is how today's First Reading shares with us about the way some of the Jews welcomed Jesus & His Good News. It says, "...Many Jews & devout Jewish converts became their followers & they spoke to them & urged them to hold fast to the grace of God... But, some of the Jews stirred up their influential women sympathizers & the leading men of the town, & in that way got a persecution started against Paul & Barnabas. The Jews finally expelled them from their territory." So, apparently some of the Jews could not recognize Jesus in Paul & Barnabas & their preaching. They caused them trouble & pushed them to reach out to the Gentiles instead. Those Jews must not have recognized Jesus in the apostles or wanted to follow Him. They certainly did not have a good relationship with Jesus or the two apostles.

As you can see, all sheep recognize the true shepherd & avoid the wolf & any harmful threat. The problem we see happening in our world these days is that the sheep could not do that. We can tell that there was a sign of that problem showing up in today's First Reading as some of the Jews turned away from Paul & Barnabas. Many people in our world cannot distinguish the true shepherd from the wolf or, fake prophet. They cannot even recognize the voice & smell of their shepherd. Worst yet, they mistake the wolf for the true shepherd & follow it instead. That is why many people in our world have got hurt & had their lives ruined.

That is the tragic consequence of following someone or something other than the true shepherd.

My dear brothers & sisters, this Fourth Sunday of Easter is often referred to as the Good Shepherd Sunday. It reminds us to make Jesus our true shepherd & learn to recognize Him. More importantly, we should appreciate the fact that Jesus is our true shepherd. Otherwise, we would face all sorts of danger in this life & end up in the wrong place after this life. It is surely a wonderful blessing to have Jesus in our lives & follow Him. I hope you would pick Jesus to be your shepherd & let Him lead your life instead of something else. I assure you that you will not regret it!