

“I KNOW MY SHEEP AND MY SHEEP KNOW ME”

A Reading From The Holy Gospel According to Saint John
(Jn 10:11-18)

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.”

The Gospel of The Lord.

Reflection:

The Gospel on the Fourth Sunday of Easter is a truly loving image of the shepherd and his flock. Jesus compared himself to a shepherd who takes care of his flock. Jesus used the image of a shepherd with his flock to describe his relationship with believers. The shepherd goes first so the sheep can follow, and the shepherd knows each sheep individually, to take care of all the sheep so they can live healthy lives.

1. The good shepherd goes before the flock.

Unlike other people who walk behind and lead the sheep, the shepherd here walks first and the sheep follow. Shepherds need to look far and wide to see if there are wild animals or thieves nearby. Especially, to pay attention to the road in front of them, because there are roads that will lead to dangerous abysses or dense forests. Some roads lead to dead ends with no exit.

That is, it is not like a hired shepherd who forces and drives the sheep away and does not know the dangers ahead that could harm the sheep, does not guide the sheep, and when there is an enemy, leaves the sheep and runs away. The true shepherd leads the way for his sheep to follow, clears traps, and fights off enemies. The shepherd does not force the sheep, but the sheep listen to the shepherd's voice, eagerly follow, and show their love and attachment to the shepherd, and eventually reach green pastures and cool streams.

Jesus gives the model of the good shepherd, who is God himself. All my life I have not found comfort for myself. He wandered through the wind and dust to find each lost sheep and bring them back to the flock. For the life of the sheep, he is willing to deal with evil to protect the sheep. He accepted death so that the sheep could live, because as He once said: "I came that they might have life and have it abundantly" (Jn. 10:10). To achieve that purpose, he had to pay a very high price, with his own life. Through this image, Jesus wants to tell us that there is only one way to serve, which is to serve as He served, which means being willing to devote oneself to and for others.

2. The good shepherd knows each sheep.

“I know my sheep, and my sheep know me, just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father, and I lay down my life for the sheep.”

Jesus always loves the flock and loves each sheep individually. It is He who loves and cares for the sheep, so the sheep can eat on green pastures and drink by cool streams. It is He who takes care to protect the sheep, so the sheep are safe from thieves and from the teeth of fierce wolves.

The image of Jesus in the shepherd is knowing each sheep and calling each sheep by name... That means out of love and responsibility, not out of ignorance and ignoring it. Indeed, the shepherd must often be present with his flock throughout the day and night. That shepherd must know his sheep clearly: which ones are sick, which ones are strong, which ones are still alive, and which ones have left the flock and strayed.

“Knowing each sheep”. Here it is not only understood as recognition, but also a close connection with each other, loving each other as equals, not as masters and servants. Knowing each sheep is not just paying attention to the *fat ones* that bring benefits to you but understanding the condition of each sheep to take care of them promptly and looking for lost sheep when you see them missing in the flock and bring it back.

There is no shortage of people who have no love for the sheep but want to enjoy the rights of the shepherd. They tried every way to force the sheep to follow them, but the sheep "refused to follow the stranger, but ran away, because they did not recognize the stranger's voice" and could not feel the stranger's love. Because the false shepherd or hireling only thinks about himself and his own interests and does not think about the sheep, *“when they see the wolf coming, they leave the sheep and run away. The wolf pounces on the sheep and scatters them”* (Jn. 10:12). A true shepherd loves the sheep, lives for them, and is willing to *“sacrifice his life for the sheep”* (Jn. 10:11) *“so that the sheep may have life and have it abundantly”* (Jn. 10:10).

Knowing about the sheep is not enough, the shepherd must also dare to dedicate himself to his sheep, even dare to sacrifice his own life, in dangerous situations. It is in this context that we can better understand the Lord's assertion, when He said: I am the good shepherd. Indeed, He wants to tell us: His relationship and dedication to us are similar to the relationship and dedication of a shepherd to his flock.

Jesus is a good shepherd who always takes care of his flock, always nourishing his flock with nutritious food. Jesus came to give us life and have it abundantly. He is the only shepherd, let us listen to His voice. Come to Him and let Him bind up your wounds, ease your pain, and restore your life. Come to Him and let Him pour love and life into our hearts.

If Jesus said: *“I came so that the sheep may have life and have it abundantly”*, He wants us to live abundantly by the stream of God's Word and be abundant with the food of His Eucharist.

Lord Jesus, as we celebrate the Feast of the Good Shepherd, we also pray for priestly and religious vocations, asking God to give us many generous souls, to know how to commit unconditionally, and to serve unconditionally, beneficial to God's flock. We also pray for everyone in each family to know how to support each other, to follow Jesus' example to love everyone. Help us to listen and live according to The Good Shepherd's example. Amen.