

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER; Cycle – A; April 30th 2023
Acts 2: 14, 36-41; 1Peter 2: 20-25; John 10: 1-10

Dear Sisters & Brothers,

The beauty of the synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, rests in the 46 parables Jesus told the people on different occasions. If we take away these parables from the first three gospels, perhaps, nothing much is left in them except the miracle accounts and a few teachings of Jesus. For it is through these parables Jesus teaches the great moral lessons. As the subjects of the parables were the day today events in the life of the local people, it was very easy for them to understand the moral lesson behind each parable. But it is surprising to notice that the author of the 4th gospel, John, does not include any of these parables in his gospels. In John Jesus does not use parables to teach; rather he uses long discourses and big arguments with the scribes and Pharisees. But John gives us two allegories or imageries which are not found in the other gospels. These are, **the Good Shepherd (John 10) and the Vine and Branches (John 15)**. Both allegories speak what Jesus' relationship with the faithful is.

Every year on the Fourth Sunday of Easter, no matter in what liturgical cycle we are in, we listen to the imagery of the **Good Shepherd in John 10**. And also this Sunday is celebrated as **Good Shepherd Sunday**. Many parishes choose this Sunday for the First Communion. Today we are very happy to have three children to receive their First Communion. In a special way we remember the great sacrifice of Jesus our Good Shepherd and also we appreciate all the Good Shepherds of the Church who render great service to the sheep on day today basis. The Church also asks her members to foster vocations for priesthood and religious life as well as pray for vocations.

The imagery of the Good Shepherd explains to us the depth of the emotional attachment Jesus has with us. In Palestine many people were shepherds and the great sacrifice they made for the protection of their sheep was well known to everybody. The good shepherds would go to any extent to rescue their sheep from the predators. It is to be remembered that Jesus borrowed this imagery from the Old Testament context. The Old Testament uses the image of a shepherd and his flock to describe the unique relationship of Israel to God. People of Israel considered God to be their shepherd. The Prophets often used this imagery in their teachings. **The psalmist addresses Yahweh as his shepherd. Psalm 23** is very famous and consoling. Our responsorial Psalm at this Mass was the same and we hear this Psalm in almost all the funerals. **In verse one the Psalmist begins, "The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing shall I want."** Again, Prophet Isaiah writes, *"Like a shepherd he feeds his flock; in his arms he gathers the lambs, carrying them in his bosom, and leading the ewes with care"* (Isaiah 40:11).

In today's gospel Jesus considers him to be the gate of the sheepfold. But in the second part of the same chapter Jesus claims to be the Good Shepherd. As we know, the Church is the sheepfold of which Jesus is the gate. A good gate is the sign of security and protection. But a strong gate alone will never give all welfare the sheep needs, rather Jesus needs good shepherds to dedicate their lives for the care of his sheep. In that sheepfold we find shepherds of different categories. *The pope, bishops, priests and deacons are shepherds to the faithful who are entrusted with the spiritual and pastoral care of the sheep; the national leaders are elected to be shepherds of the countrymen and they have to see the material welfare of the sheep; the parents are shepherds to the children whose responsibility is tremendous as they are the ones to form the future citizens of the nation, and the teachers should be good shepherds to their students.*

When all these shepherds work together according to the will and plan of Jesus, the Church and nation are secure. Their failure in these roles will be the death knell to both the Church and nation. In a way, none of us can escape from the role of shepherding. Many of you are parents who did a good job in bringing up your children well; others are young parents who are active in shepherding their children. Some of you are teachers. As your pastor, my responsibility is bigger and challenging and the number of sheep I am entrusted with is bigger. These days, if we find the loss of faith among the faithful, to great extent, it is due to the lack of faith and holiness in the pastors. A good and dedicated pastor definitely will help the faithful to grow in faith and holiness. Today we also pray for vocations. We need more good pastors. **Pope Benedict XVI once said, "It is more important to have good priests than many priests. The world will be what the Church is; the Church will be what the priests are."** And also the faithful should pray for the pastors, so that they may be guided by the Holy Spirit.