

## **7 May 2017 (4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter, Year A)**

Acts 2:14,36-41; Psalm 22(23); 1Peter 2:20-25; John 10:1-10.

### **I am the gate of the sheepfold!**

This Sunday we turn our attention to chapter 10 of the gospel according to John. In this chapter Jesus takes up an interesting Old Testament image of God as the shepherd of his people. There are various Old Testament texts that speak of prophets as shepherds but also the promise that it is God himself who will shepherd his people. A very interesting image is in the book of the prophet Ezekiel, chapter 34.

The image we need to keep in mind is that of a flock of sheep that are taken out to pasture during the day, and then brought into the fold for the night. At different moments of this analogy Jesus takes on the role of both shepherd and gate to the sheepfold.

Jesus is the shepherd who makes sure the sheep are protected and well looked after. He shows concern for his sheep, calling them individually by name. He is also the gate, and it is only through him that the sheep can go in and out of the fold.

Other people try to get into the fold. They dress up and present themselves as shepherds, but in fact they are there to cause harm and distress; they are thieves and brigands. Other sheep also find refuge in the sheepfold at night, and when the good shepherd comes, he calls out his own sheep, which he knows by name. In a situation where different people are calling out, sheep need to learn to recognise the voice of their shepherd, he is the one who offers them security. The analogy is quite fluid and cannot be pushed too far because it can 'break.'

One question we need to consider in this analogy (parable) is our relationship with Jesus. We are the sheep and he is the good shepherd who gives up his life for us. We live in a world with many competing voices trying to get our attention. We need to be careful we can single out the voice of the good shepherd; he is the one we need to follow.

In order for us to get used to the shepherd's voice, we need to spend time listening to his voice. Faith is a relationship with God, especially through his Son. How do I get to know the shepherd in my own life? Prayer and the Church are perhaps the most obvious places, but God is also present in the poor and the needy. We who are baptised form the Body of Christ, the Church. (Church leaders, for whom we pray in a special way this Sunday, form only a part of the Body of Christ and not the whole body.) Jesus is in his Church when we come together to offer sacrifice to the Father. There we listen to God's voice through his Word that is proclaimed to us.

Private and personal prayer, where I get in contact personally with God, is also essential. In my daily life I need to find time to sit in silence and listen to God's voice within me. The Word of God in the scriptures is a very important source of prayer, as I reflect on what God is telling me today.

I also need to go out and listen and touch God in his poor and needy. Here he too challenges me and speaks to me to act out in justice. Once again, am I open to God's voice in the world around me?

Another interesting image is the gate of the sheepfold. We are encouraged to regularly come in and out of the fold. We come into the fold for security, but we also need to leave the fold in order to find fresh pastures to nourish us. Each time we need to pass through the gate that is Jesus. This image speaks of a continuous relationship with Jesus. We cannot stop or abandon our relationship with Jesus. It is through him that we can have life.

Fr Mario