

GOSPEL

JOHN 10:1-10

Jesus said: 'I tell you most solemnly, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold through the gate, but gets in some other way is a thief and brigand. The one who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the flock; the gatekeeper lets him in, the sheep hear his voice, one by one he calls his own sheep and leads them out. When he has brought out his flock, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow because they know his voice. They never follow a stranger but run away from him: they do not recognise the voice of strangers.'

Jesus told them this parable but they failed to understand what he meant by telling it to them. So Jesus spoke to them again: 'I tell you most solemnly, I am the gate of the sheepfold. All others who have come are thieves and brigands; but the sheep took no notice of them. I am the gate. Anyone who enters through me will be safe: he will go freely in and out and be sure of finding pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full.'

A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

In the Gospel for this Sunday, known as "Good Shepherd Sunday", Jesus presents to us two images which complete each other. The image of the *shepherd* and the image of the *door* of the sheepfold. The flock, which is all of us, has a sheepfold as its home, which serves as a refuge, where the sheep live and rest after the toils of the journey. And the sheepfold has an enclosure with a door, where there is a gatekeeper. Different people approach the flock: there is one who enters the enclosure by the door and one who "climbs in by another way". The first is the shepherd, the second a stranger who does not love the sheep and wants to enter for other reasons. Jesus identifies with the first and shows a familiar relationship with the sheep, expressed by his voice, by which he calls them and which they recognize and follow. He calls them,

to lead them out to grassy pastures where they find good food.

The second image by which Jesus presents himself is that of the "door of the sheep". In fact, he says: "I am the door; if any one enters by me, he will be saved"; that is, they "will have life and will have it abundantly". Christ, the Good Shepherd, became the door of mankind's salvation, because he offered his life for his sheep.

Jesus, *Good Shepherd* and *door* of the sheep, is a leader whose authority is expressed in service, a leader who, in order to command, gives his life and does not ask others to sacrifice theirs. One can trust in a leader like this, as the sheep who heed their shepherd's voice because they know that with him one goes to good and abundant pastures. A signal, a call suffices, and they follow; they obey; they begin to walk, guided by the voice of the One whom they feel as a friendly presence, strong and mild at once, who calls, protects, consoles and soothes.

This is how Christ is for us. There is a dimension of the Christian experience, that perhaps we leave somewhat in the shadows: the spiritual and affective dimension. Feeling connected to the Lord by a special bond, as sheep to their shepherd. At times we rationalize faith too much and we run the risk of losing the perception of the timbre of that voice, of the voice of Jesus the Good Shepherd, which motivates and fascinates. This is what happened to the two disciples of Emmaus, whose hearts burned as the Risen One spoke along the way. It is the wondrous experience of feeling loved by Jesus. Ask yourselves the question: "Do I feel loved by Jesus? Do I feel loved by Jesus?". To him we are never strangers, but friends and brothers. Yet it is not always easy to discern the Good Shepherd's voice. Be careful. There is always the risk of being distracted by the din of so many other voices. Today we are invited not to let ourselves be distracted by the false wisdom of this world, but to follow Jesus, the Risen One, as the one sure guide who gives meaning to our life.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- In your life, do you listen out for the voice of the Shepherd, Jesus? What ways do you actively seek to listen for the voice of God? How do you distinguish between the voice of the Shepherd and the voices of thieves and brigands?
- Jesus said he came that we may have life and have it to the full. What does a full life look like to you? Does it differ to a worldly understanding of a full life and, if so, how?
- What does it mean to you to follow Jesus? If you wanted to follow him more closely, what would you do?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the 'Glory Be' or similar prayer.