

Homily of Fourth Sunday of Easter, Year C, 2025

Acts 13:14, 43-52; Psalm 100:1-2, 3,5; Revelation 7:9, 14-17; John 14:23

Today is Good Shepherd Sunday. The first reading narrates the experience of two great shepherds in the early Church, Paul and Barnabas. At that time, their work of evangelization was very successful. “Many Jews and worshippers who were converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas... When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and with violent abuse contradicted what Paul said.” The Jews, further, “incited the women of prominence who were worshippers and the leading men of the city, stirred up a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their territory.”

Even now, some shepherds have the same experience of rejection and expulsion. Let such shepherds be strengthened by the experience of Paul and Barnabas, and also follow the footsteps of Paul and Barnabas when it becomes necessary. “So they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them, and went to Iconium. The disciples were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.” This is important because, sometimes, some shepherds, unwisely, think that shaking off dust from their feet and going somewhere else is a sign of weakness and a sign of accepting defeat. Jesus says, “When they persecute you in one place, flee to another. Truly I tell you, you will not finish going through the towns of Israel till the Son of Man comes” (Matthew 10:23). Let shepherds be filled with joy and the Holy Spirit and be guided by the word of God.

It is helpful to pay a little more attention to this line in the first reading, “When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and with violent abuse contradicted what Paul said.” Jealousy is an unhappy feeling of wanting to have what someone else has. It is a feeling of resentment against a rival or against a person enjoying success or advantage. Jealousy is a dangerous spiritual disease. It drains up joy and peace and leaves whomever it possesses bitter and downcast. It causes spiritual blindness to whom it possesses and prevents the person from seeing God’s beauty in other people. It poisons the mind and body and weaponizes whom it possesses to inflict harm on its target. It is Satan’s dangerous weapon of destruction. Let us flee from this spiritual disease.

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, says in today’s gospel, “My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. No one can take them out of my hand.” Jesus speaks to us every day through the Scripture. In addition, he speaks to us through communion with God in spiritual activities, through our fellow human beings, and through events of life.

There are other voices, too. The Evil One and the world speak to us. These voices try to lead us astray or distract us. Hearing and listening to the Good Shepherd’s voice has become increasingly difficult for men and women of our generation amid the misleading or distracting voices. We are invited to be attentive, listen, discern, and follow the Good Shepherd so that no one can take us out of his hand, whether we are alive or dead. We pray for the grace to do so.

As we celebrate Good Shepherd Sunday, we also pray for good and attentive listening between the priests and the faithful. Pope Francis’ appeal to priests and the faithful: To priests he says, “This is what I am asking you, be shepherds with the smell of sheep, so that people can sense the priest is not just concerned with his own congregation, but is also a fisher of men.” “A good priest anoints his people with the oil of gladness, by preaching the Gospel with unction, that is with the soothing, comforting words of

God.” “If people leave Mass looking as if they have heard good news, then the priest has clearly done his job well.” To the faithful Pope Francis says, “Be close to your priests with affection and with your prayers, that they may always be shepherds according to God’s heart.”

Priests are not the only shepherds. Everyone is a shepherd wherever the person has a responsibility. Let us pray to our Good Shepherd to grant us the grace to be good shepherds at our various shepherding responsibilities no matter how big or how small; at home, at church, at work and business places, and in the society. While we easily see how other people are not shepherding well, we need to reflect and ask ourselves, how are we shepherding our own responsibilities?

The second reading assures us what our Good Shepherd does for us, “The one who sits on the throne will shelter them. They will not hunger or thirst anymore, nor will the sun or any heat strike them. For the Lamb who is in the center of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to springs of life-giving water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (Revelation 7:15-17). May it be so for you and for me. Amen.

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