

## **Shepherd and Gate**

Fourth Sunday of Easter - Jn 10:1-10

Ave Maria Catholic Church, April 30, 2023 - Fr. David M Vidal

Today we celebrate the Good Shepherd Sunday. Jesus is the divine Shepherd who did not let suffering, persecution, and rejection deter Him from His mission: to lead us to the Father's home.

### **Jesus is our Shepherd, and we are his flock: we must follow Him.**

Perhaps, we may have a vague understanding of what following the Good Shepherd means. Sometimes, to be a sheep is taken as being deprived of sense, not having sound reasoning, or being dumb. Is that what Christ wants for us? Not at all!

In the gospel, Jesus indicates that His sheep know Him and that this knowledge is very profound. The followers of Christ know how to distinguish the Good Shepherd's voice from the stranger's or mercenaries' voices. There is no dumbness to be found in Jesus's flock. They understand what goodness means, and they follow what is good!

Now, true knowledge has consequences. Once we find the true leader of our souls and understand that we have a Shepherd who came to guide us to goodness, justice, truth, love, and everything worthy of praise, is it possible for us to passively recognize His presence and to keep going about our own business?

If we truly understand what the *Good Shepherd* is and what the *Good Shepherd* does, we will follow in his footsteps.

The Pharisees did not understand Jesus' life and message. For that reason, Jesus explains his role with another image: Jesus said again, "*Amen, amen, I say to you, I am the gate for the sheep,*" (John 10: 7).

### **Jesus is not only our Shepherd, but Jesus is also the Gate.**

Later in St. John's gospel, we read Jesus's words: "*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*" (John 14: 6). Jesus is the Gate through which we go to the Father.

Who does not want to enjoy the wedding feast in the Father's Kingdom? Who does not want to be part of that eternal celebration of happiness, love, and mercy? However, how often do we want to enter the Father's kingdom on our own terms? We even rationalize it: "This is how I am," "This is my style," "This is my way of doing things." Now, did we ever try to consider if our ways are truly God's ways?

We must remember that there is a Gate and that the Gate is Jesus. If we happily go with all our luggage and heavy loads, we may try to go through the Gate, but we will experience the unhappy event of being unable to enter. We may try to cross with those large beams on our shoulders, but it will not be possible.

Let us not lie to ourselves. The Gate has beautiful proportions and measures. Without proportions and measures, the Gate wouldn't be beautiful. Accepting those proportions and measures requires humility. We must receive Jesus's message and life "as it is," not as we wish it would be.

To accept Jesus' message "as it is" requires humility, a virtue that the Pharisees did not have. Humility is the beginning of wisdom. Humility is the foundation of holiness. If we have humble and meek hearts, we will be ready to receive Jesus's words and examples and make them ours. If we have humble and meek hearts, we will understand that our ways have not always been His ways. Then, we will accept Jesus's grace and follow in his footsteps.

Perhaps, we have been away from the Lord, but we want to be converted and return to Jesus's guidance and direction. How do we return to Jesus, the Shepherd, and Guardian of our souls?

**First, to return to Jesus, we must know Christ and His message.**

Many people call Jesus their savior, but ignore what salvation means! Many people call Jesus Lord, but do not recognize the nature of Jesus's kingdom!

The first responsibility of the follower of Christ is to know Jesus and his message. We must cultivate our souls. We do cultivate our souls when we listen to the Scriptures every Sunday. However, we should do more. We must have a personal encounter with the word of God. When we meditate on the *Sacred Scriptures*, we open ourselves to God's direction. He becomes our interior master. In that personal encounter with the word of God, we learn how to recognize his voice.

Now, to be sure that we truly understand what God is telling us, we must also read and understand the teachings of the Catholic Church. To ignore the voice of the Church is to ignore the voice of Christ because Jesus founded the Church and gave her the task of leading us towards Him.

**Second, to return to Jesus, we must pray.**

True knowledge of Christ cannot be separated from prayer. St. Alphonsus of Liguori teaches, "*He who tastes honey, knows it better than all the philosophers who think about it and explain its nature. Likewise, the wisdom of the saints is not acquired from books, but*

*from prayer, where the teacher is Jesus Christ and the textbook is the Savior's cross and wounds."*

Yes, we are encouraged to read and study the books of the saints, spiritual authors, and good theologians. We are encouraged to listen to enriching and faithful conferences and lectures. However, we must never forget that our goal is to learn Christ! And we learn Christ when we have a personal encounter with Him through prayer.

**Finally, to return to Jesus, we must imitate Him.**

If we truly encounter the Lord Jesus and understand His message, we cannot remain indifferent to his teachings. Jesus's teachings demand an answer, and our response must be seen in concrete actions.

The true follower of Christ walks in Jesus's footsteps. In his first letter, Saint Peter reminds us: "*Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his footsteps,*" (1 Peter 2: 21).

Let us know, encounter, and imitate our *Good Shepherd*. He is the Shepherd and Guardian of our souls. Following His guidance, we will live a life of righteousness here on earth and find eternal and complete happiness in the life to come. Amen.