

HOM 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday Easter c 2019 May 12

Today's Gospel reading makes known the fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy about Jesus, spoken 600 years before His birth. In that prophecy, the Lord speaking through the prophet Ezekiel (34: 1-31), in chastisement of the Jewish leaders who had been pasturing themselves instead of God's flock, promised to shepherd God's people Himself.

*"Because my shepherds did not look after my sheep, but pastured themselves" ...says the Lord..."I myself will look after and tend my sheep." "I will rescue them from every place where they were scattered when it was cloudy and dark....In good pastures will I pasture them...The lost I will seek out, the strayed I will bring back, the injured I will bind up, the sick I will heal...."*

This 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter is referred to as Good Shepherd Sunday because the Gospel reading always comes from Chapter 10 of John's Gospel account wherein Jesus speaks of Himself as the Good Shepherd and the gate through which His sheep enter into abundant life-giving pastures and are saved.

*"My sheep hear my voice", Jesus says in today's reading, "I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish".*

In last Sunday's Gospel reading when Jesus told Peter, *"Feed my lambs. Tend my sheep. Feed my sheep"*, He was re-affirming His appointment of Peter as the leader of His Church, the first Pope, and therefore the first Chief Shepherd of God's people in Christ.

There have been 266 popes, 265 successors of St. Peter. A handful have been morally corrupt and the official statements of two other popes – Honorius I (625-638) and John XXII (1316-1334) -- were condemned as heretical personal beliefs that contradicted defined Church teaching. John XXII recanted his erroneously held belief before he died.

In view of this, and especially in consideration of the Church's current state of affairs, it is important to be reminded that Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is STILL shepherding His Flock through His Chief Shepherd on earth, Pope Francis, and the college of bishops. Despite the doctrinal confusion of our day and the moral failings of the hierarchy in our times, Christ continues to lead His Church. He will guide it in Truth and lead it in charity along the way of purification through mounting hostilities without, and growing defections within. He will lead it into the new heavens and the new earth.

Jesus thus beckons all the faithful to join in His oblation made present in the Mass – in His self-offering to the Father's will unto the Cross and Resurrection -- for the life of the world, the salvation of all the willing. This is the exercise of our baptismal priesthood. Priest and laity are to join in this.

In his apostolic exhortation on the formation of priests, John-Paul II taught that:

The ministry of the (ordained) priest ... *aims at promoting the exercise of the common priesthood of the entire People of God; (16)*

Thus people are invited and led to offer themselves, their works and all creation with Christ. (26)

So, whether one is called to marriage or to the single lay state or to consecrated religious life or to priesthood, this is where these callings come together. We are all called to offer ourselves to God – deliberately, freely and without reservation – in praise and thanksgiving and obedient love – unto the Cross and Resurrection with Jesus -- for the true good all whom the Father loves, beginning with those we hold dear.

Today's second reading is a glimpse into where this leads us – to a place among the Blessed – with that great heavenly multitude wearing robes made white in the blood of the Lamb by sharing in Jesus' saving sacrifice of love.

In that vision of John's those who follow Jesus are there worshipping day and night before the throne of God. We're told that the Lamb is at the center of the throne – one with the Father. He has shepherded all the willing there in oneness with Himself. We are being led there to share His divine glory forever. Our Eucharistic self-offering renews and perfects our oneness with Jesus and will make it eternal.

In our first reading, Paul and Barnabas proclaimed the Gospel message to the Jewish people at Antioch and many accepted it. But those who did not stirred up violence against them and had them expelled. The two then offered the Gospel to Gentiles who were delighted to receive it.

So it is today. The Gospel message which draws those who receive it into the Death and Resurrection of Jesus – into His oblation -- attracts some, is opposed by others, and is ignored by many, but it is to be proclaimed to all. Those who belong to Jesus the Good Shepherd hear His voice and follow Him in His self-offering. This self-offering is made for everyone, including those who violently oppose Jesus and His Church.

In the Responsorial Psalm refrain, we three times declared that we are His people, the sheep of His flock. Let us then call on Mary's motherly help in following her Son as she did, unto the Cross and Resurrection. We can do this using our Eucharistic Self-Offering Prayer and living it out. I invite you to pray it silently and sincerely at Holy Communion. These are the words: I AM ALL YOURS O MOST LOVING JESUS THROUGH MARY YOUR MOTHER.