

Fourth Sunday of Easter C2025

The readings of this fourth Sunday of Easter talk about the work of evangelization and its difficulties. They invite us to realize that, whatever might happen to us in the mission, Jesus is always with us and takes care of us as the good shepherd.

The first reading of the Acts of the Apostles describes the missionary work of Paul and his companion Barnabas in the region of Antioch. It shows what they did in exhorting the converts to remain faithful to the grace of God. It shows also how, thanks to their teaching, the word of the Lord spread throughout the whole region.

But, as many people turned to them, that created jealousy among the Jews. As a consequence, they were abused, contradicted and expelled from the region. Because of that situation and the rejection of the message of eternal life, they finally turned to the Gentiles who were delighted and glorified God.

What is behind this text is the idea that eternal life comes to someone when he converts to God and changes his life. Any hardness of heart and lack of conversion on the part of anyone who is listening to the word of God are serious obstacles to the reception of eternal life. Another idea is the truth that life is not always a continuous success story. As we sometimes succeed, we can also fail in our enterprise. But, in all the cases, whatever might be the dark circumstances of our life, God does not abandon us; he is always with us.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus gives us the assurance that he is always with us. First of all, the Gospel starts with Jesus' statement that his sheep listen to his voice and follow him. He, then, declares that he gives them eternal life and they will never perish. Moreover, no one can take them out of his hand or that of his Father, because his Father is greater than all. Finally, Jesus declares that the Father and he are just one.

What do we learn from this Gospel? The first thing I want to highlight is the chance of having a guarantee. What is a guarantee? The Webster dictionary defines the guarantee as an assurance or an agreement by which one person undertakes to secure another in the possession or the enjoyment of something.

For instance, when we buy a new car and we have a guarantee, we are assured that if something happens to our machine while under guarantee, we have the chance to replace it or to obtain reparation without cost. The guarantee provides us of an assurance that under some conditions, we are safe and secure with regard to the good we possess.

When our Lord says that his sheep that listen to his voice, will not perish, and no one can snatch them out of his hand, he is presenting himself as our guarantor. He vouches for our spiritual integrity and our eternal life. He gives an assurance that whatever might happen to us, if we stand with him, our spiritual security is assured.

Because the guarantee works under some conditions, our Lord reminds us that we have to listen to him and follow him if we do not want to fall from his hands and to perish. This is a true challenge for us, because we live in a world where many voices exist and we always run the risk of listening to other things rather than those which can help us for our eternal salvation. Sometimes, we listen to the voices that kill our hearing to the point that we become deaf to the voice of our Lord. Sometimes, we follow easily other masters rather than our Lord who can lead us to the Father where our eternal salvation is guaranteed.

When our Lord says that no one can take the sheep out of his hand or that of his father, does it mean that those who believe have no problems to the point that nothing can happen to them? That would be a very optimistic and not realistic interpretation of the words of Jesus. The truth, in fact, is that whatever might happen to us, we will never be crushed down. And, we are not alone; our Lord and his Father are with us. They will protect us and sustain us. In so far as we listen to our Lord and follow him, our eternal salvation is guaranteed and our spiritual safety is assured.

I want also to point out the importance of unity with our Lord. When our Lord says that he and his Father are one, he is pointing to the unity that exists between him and the Father. That unity is based on the relationship of interdependence they have with one another.

Our Lord does not live in isolation or acts on his own, but rather in connection with the Father. He draws his glory from the Father and acts in union with him. The acts of our Lord glorify the Father and the Father is glorified in what Jesus does. There is nothing that Jesus does which is not oriented to the Father.

The implication for our life of disciples is that, as our Lord and the Father are one, we too should also live in unity with him and with the Father. Without maintaining the relationship of unity with the Father and our Lord, our life falls apart. As human experience has taught us, true unity presupposes a sharing in some common goal, a pursuit of a same ideal and a sharing in a same vision of things. Listening to our Lord, following him and putting into practice his recommendations allows us to keep unity with him. If we grow apart from our Lord and his Father, we cannot maintain a viable relationship with him.

To make that unity complete, we should also live in unity with our fellows. Any relationship with God which neglects the relationship with our fellows tends to isolate us and deceive us with regard to the real motivation that should animate us when we believe in God. Our relationship with God gains its meaning when it also takes into account our relationship with our fellows.

Let us pray, then, that God may help us to stay in unity with him and with one another so that his word may prosper among us. Let us pray for all the mothers of the world, as we celebrate them today, that they might be blessed by our Lord, the good Shepherd. May our Lord bless our Pope Leo XIV at the beginning of his pontificate! Amen

Acts 13: 14, 43-52; Revelations 7: 9, 14b-17; John 10: 27-30



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