

My dear people of God, fourth Sunday of Easter is popularly known as the **Good Shepherd Sunday**. We meditate on the '**pastoral' love of God**. Pope John Paul II also declared the fourth Sunday of Easter as a **Day of Prayer for Vocations**. We pray that many youth may listen to the voice of Jesus, as he calls, that they may enter into priesthood and consecrated life. Today, Jesus says, "**I know them and they know me; and I give them eternal life.**" The Good shepherds are those who really take their jobs seriously, who will make sure that nothing happens to their flock, even if they put their own lives in danger. For example, they will be the ones who will fight the wolves that are attacking the flocks. Jesus calls himself the good shepherd in John Chapter 10. He is willing to die for his flock, his followers. Not just this flock, but he says there are other sheep out there, and he must gather them, and bring them into the protectiveness of his flock, until there is only one shepherd and one flock. The other sheep he is referring to **are the Gentiles, and his present flock is the Jews**.

In the Hebrew sense, the verb "**to know**" is not a mere intellectual activity. The organ for knowing is the **heart!** In fact, it is the same knowing that is used to describe the relationship between a husband and wife. Yes, Jesus loves and knows us with his heart. Just as a man loves and knows his wife. Hence the **good shepherd knows his sheep and they know him (Jn.10:14)**. There is a mutual bond of love and intimacy. That love is compared to the deep mutual relationship that exists between Jesus and his Father. "My own know me just as the Father knows me ". Indeed, Jesus knows each one of us by name.... he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out (Jn.10:3). Secondly, Jesus emphasizes the self-sacrificing element in his own life: "**The good shepherd is one who lays down his life for his sheep (Jn.10:11)**. On, at least, four occasions Jesus says in John 10: I lay down my life for my sheep. Indeed, he has done it on the cross for us. Jesus is the gate that leads to eternal life. Jesus is the door of the sheep; in other words, Christ is the way, the truth, and the life; no one goes to the Father, but except through Jesus (Jn.14:6). Thirdly, the good shepherd deeply desires that many other sheep should come to identify themselves with him. "**There are other sheep I have that are not of this fold and these I have to lead as well**"(Jn.10:16). **The good shepherd ultimate goal is that "there will be only one flock and one shepherd"**, that the whole world will be united with Creator. This is the meaning of the Kingdom, which is at the heart of the Gospel message.

Today's first reading forms part of Peter's address on the healing of the cripple man from birth. Peter, the first shepherd of the Christian community presenting his defense against the "wolf" attacking the little flock and the Scripture testified that he was filled with the Holy Spirit. Peter gave a persuasive and powerful response to the Council about the cripple man "healed". The verb "healed" has the double sense of 'to heal' and 'to save'. It echoes the salvation theme of the prophecy of Joel (2:21). Peter gave a theological rather than a legal explanation "Jesus whom you crucified and whom God raised from the dead" in his name this man stands before you healed (Acts 4:10). "This is the stone rejected by you the builders, but which has proved to be the keystone. For of all the names in the world given to men, this is the only one by which we can be saved." (Ps.118:22). Peter applies the words of Psalm 118:22 to Jesus, conscious no doubt that our Lord had referred to himself as the stone rejected... (Mt.21:42).

Finally, dear friends, Jesus our good shepherd loves and cares for us. He knows all of us totally. He leads us into the greener pasture and water to revive our drooping spirit. He feels and defends us at all times in prayer, the Word of God and above giving us his body and blood for our spiritual and physical nourishment. Let us do our best in all our dealings, so that we can be a reflection of Christ for people to see Christ in us and be attracted to us. There are still so many millions of people who have not yet followed the teachings of the good shepherd. They seek meaning and happiness in their lives by pursuing all kinds of other goals, which inevitably turn to ashes. In so doing, they reject Jesus the Good Shepherd. Let us pray in this Mass for the grace to follow Christ with sincerity of heart so that he will lead us to the restful waters and refresh our soul. Amen!