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Commentary on the Gospel: The Joy That Changes the World

Gospel for the 4th Sunday of Easter (Cycle B), and commentary.

Gospel (*Jn* 10:11-18)

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hireling and not a shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hireling and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd; I know my own and

my own know me, as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again; this charge I have received from my Father.”

Commentary

The image of the good shepherd was well known by those listening to Jesus. In the Old Testament, Moses and David, before God chose them to be shepherds of his people, had been

shepherds of flocks. Later on, during the exile, Ezekiel had spoken of God himself as the shepherd of his people: “As a shepherd seeks out his flock ... so will I seek out my sheep; and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness” (*Ezek 34:12*).

Jesus announces that this day has now arrived. He is God made man who watches over us, who gathers us into a family, the family of the children of God, and feeds us with his own Body so that we may have eternal life. And he wants to make us good shepherds for others in our daily life.

Jesus gives three characteristics of a true shepherd. He gives his life for the sheep; he knows them and they know him; and he goes in search of them so that they all may live as one flock, as one family.[1]

In the first place, the shepherd gives his life for the sheep. The mystery of the Cross is at the center of Christ's life. Christ lays aside his divine glory and puts on the clothing of our humanity, with its pain, suffering, loneliness, abandonment. He becomes like us in all things, except sin, and lets himself be humiliated on the Cross, giving himself for each of us.

In each celebration of the Eucharist we find Christ, the Good Shepherd. He becomes totally present. He takes us in his wounded hands, blesses us, raises us up, and gives himself to us as food.

In every Eucharistic celebration he gives us his Body which is given up for us, his Blood which is shed for us. He gives us the strength to share in his self-giving to the end. The Mass doesn't end with Communion. He wants us to live with a Eucharistic

soul every day, with our hearts enkindled, giving our life for others.

Secondly, the true shepherd knows the sheep, and they know him. Christ knows us through and through: he carries us in his heart. A wounded Heart, pierced by love. He cries out to us: “don’t hide yourself, come to me, don’t grow tired, touch me, I love you.” And when we draw near Jesus, when we enter his Heart, he gives us his own heart so that we may share in his love. He asks us also to love as he does, to know the others as he does.

Finally, the true shepherd seeks unity. Christ did not die for a few; he died for all men and women of all times. And he continues seeking them every day and needs our help. In our daily lives, in our work and rest, our families and friendships, our sorrows and joys, our successes and failure.... There, right where we

spend our daily lives, we need to love with Christ's heart.

In every Mass, he places us in his priestly Heart, so that we make our own his praise, gratitude, reparation, and petition. He gives us a catholic, universal heart.

The good shepherd gives his life, knows with the heart, and seeks unity. That is what Jesus is like, and that is how he wants us to be. Only in this way do we experience true freedom. The freedom of the children of God, the freedom of Christ Jesus, the freedom of generous self-giving.

Jesus joyfully changes the world with his self-giving. We, by sharing in his self-giving, share in his joy which changes the world.

[1] Cf. Benedict XVI, *Homily in Mass for Priestly Ordinations*, 7 May 2006.

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