

Commentary on the Gospel: "Jesus' love is invincible"

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

Gospel (*Jn 10:27-30*)

At that time Jesus said: My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one.

Commentary

The fourth Sunday of Easter is known as “Good Shepherd Sunday.” In all the liturgical cycles the Gospel for this Sunday contains some passages from *Jn 10:1-30*, a collection of Jesus’ sayings centered on the image of the shepherd and the sheep. In the passage for this Sunday, Jesus speaks about the protection God gives to those who turn to Him.

The image of shepherd and the sheep has deep biblical roots. Important figures in the history of Israel were shepherds; for example, Abel (*Gen 4:2*), Moses (*Ex 3:1ff.*), and David (*1 Sam 16:11-13*). David and his descendants would be, like Joshua (*Num 27:17f.*), shepherds of their people. But God himself is often described as a shepherd who watches over the people, “his

sheep" (cf. *Gen* 49:15; *Is* 40:11; *Ezek* 34:5; *Ps* 23:1; *Sir* 18:13).

The fact that Jesus' discourses on the good shepherd are presented during the Easter season therefore has a very deep significance, as Benedict XVI explained: "We are led straight to the center, to the summit of the revelation of God as the Shepherd of his people; this center and summit is Jesus, Jesus himself who dies on the Cross and rises from the tomb on the third day, rises with all his humanity and thereby involves us, every man and woman, in his passage from death to life."[1]

The Gospel of Saint John tells us that Jesus pronounced the words read on this Sunday during the Jewish feast of the Dedication of the Temple. This feast commemorates the purification of the site and the dedication of the altar of sacrifice during the era of the Maccabees, who fortified the walls to

protect the sacred precinct from profanations like those carried out under Antiochus IV Epiphanes (cf. *1 Mac* 4:52-61 and *2 Mac* 10:1-9).

Moreover, Jesus was speaking in a place called “Solomon’s portico.” This walled-in space with strong columns may have served as an image for the protection Jesus promised to provide for the sheep.

As Pope Francis said, Jesus’s words this Sunday “communicate to us a sense of absolute security and immense tenderness. Our life is fully secure in the hands of Jesus and the Father, which are a single thing: a unique love, a unique mercy, revealed once and for all in the sacrifice of the Cross ... Because of this we are no longer afraid: our life is now saved from perdition. Nothing and no one can take us from the hands of Jesus, because nothing and no one can overcome his love. Jesus’ love is invincible.”^[2]

Jesus' closeness and protection for his sheep will also lead us to a great hope in our life and our efforts to please God. As Saint Josemaria said: "The virtue of hope assures us that God governs us with his all-powerful Providence and that he gives us all the means we need. Hope makes us aware of our Lord's constant good will towards mankind, towards you and me. He is always ready to hear us, because he never tires of listening. He is interested in your joys, your successes, your love, and also in your worries, your suffering and your failures. So do not hope in him only when you realize you are weak. Call upon your heavenly Father in good times and in bad, taking refuge in his merciful protection. And our conviction that we are nothing (it doesn't take a high degree of humility to recognize the truth that we are nothing but a row of zeros) will turn into irresistible strength, because Christ will be the

one to the left of these zeros, converting them into an immeasurable figure! ‘The Lord is my strength and my refuge; whom shall I fear?’”[3]

[1] Benedict XVI, *Homily*, 29 April 2012.

[2] Pope Francis, *Regina Coeli*, 17 April 2016.

[3] Saint Josemaria, *Friends of God*, no. 218.

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