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Meditations: Sunday of the Fourth Week of Easter (Year A)

Some reflections that can assist our prayer on this Fourth Sunday of Easter, also known as Good Shepherd Sunday.

04/30/2023

- The Good Shepherd knows each of us perfectly
- Confidence from knowing that our Lord is guiding us
- We are part of Christ's family

THIS FOURTH SUNDAY of Easter is traditionally called Good Shepherd Sunday. We read in the Gospel for today's Mass that, during the Feast of the Dedication, Jesus spoke these words in the portico of Solomon in the Temple of Jerusalem: *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 (Jn 10:27-30).*

The entire Church rejoices because the Risen Christ is our Shepherd and knows each one of us. *It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture (Ps 100:3).* He knows us perfectly with "a profound personal relationship: a knowledge of the heart, of one who loves and one who is loved; of one who is faithful and

one who knows how to be trustworthy.”^[1] — The Risen Lord understands us “with the most ‘interior’ knowledge, with the same knowledge with which the Son knows and embraces the Father and, in the Father, embraces infinite truth and love.”^[2] —

The sheep of the flock recognize the voice of their shepherd; they respond to his call and follow him. Hearing the voice and whistle of their shepherd, the sheep are comforted, because they know they are safe.

“The mystery of his voice is evocative: only think that from our mother’s womb we learn to recognize her voice and that of our father; it is from the tone of a voice that we perceive love or contempt, affection or coldness. Jesus’ voice is unique! If we learn to distinguish it, he guides us on the path of life.”^[3] —

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THE FIRST APOSTLES set out for the known world with this certainty. They knew they were witnesses to this unique love, and felt safe in God's hands. When some paths were closed to them, they bravely opened up others. This is what Paul and Barnabas did in Antioch of Pisidia, upon encountering the closed hearts and envy of some of the Jews. *It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us (Acts 13:46-47).*

Nothing bad can happen to us if we trust in Christ and let Him guide us, as a good shepherd, with his powerful hand. Then *his sheep shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their*

shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water; and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes (Rev 7:16-17).

This does not mean that Christians stop experiencing difficulties and trials. Jesus himself warns his apostles: *they will deliver you up to councils; and you will be beaten in synagogues; and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear testimony before them (Mk 13:9).*

A child of God faces the inevitable setbacks that every path in life entails with the confidence that “Jesus knows our strengths and our defects, and is always ready to care for us, to heal the wounds of our errors with the abundance of his grace.”^[4] That is why He is the Good Shepherd. He “is concerned about his sheep. He gathers them, binds their wounds, heals their ailments.”^[5] —

THROUGH THE IMAGE of the Good Shepherd, Jesus reveals his union with the Father: *I and the Father are one . . . the Father is in me and I am in the Father (Jn 10:30.38)*. The Jewish authorities had asked him: *How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly (Jn 10:24)*. Jesus' reply is so bold and surprising that it scandalizes them: *Because you, being a man, make yourself God (Jn 10:33)*. Many of the listeners react with faith, but some, especially the leaders of the people, reject Him with hatred, to the point of picking up rocks to stone Him.

The union between the Father and the Son is a central point of God's mystery. The Father sanctified the Son and sent Him into the world (cf. *Jn 10:36*), and entrusted Him with the mission of caring for the sheep. We are part of Christ's family because He himself has chosen us (cf. *Eph 1:4*).
“We come into his fold, drawn by his

call, his gentle whistle as our Good Shepherd, certain that only in its shelter will we find true happiness both here and in eternity.”^[6] Our Lord goes out in search of everyone because “all his sheep are very important to him, and he does not close the doors to those who are wounded, to the mangy, when they return eager to let themselves be healed.”^[7]

Therefore we are moved by Jesus’ complaint on confronting the obstinacy of some hearts: *I told you, and you do not believe (Jn 10:25)*. Faith requires an attentive and free will, a heart that wants to listen to the shepherd’s voice. “I can see thanks to the sunlight; but if I close my eyes, I don’t see. This is not the fault of the sun, but my own fault, because when I close my eyes I keep the sunlight from reaching me.”^[8] Mary will help us to open our hearts wide to God’s love, to listen with joy

to the voice of the Good Shepherd
who calls us by our name.

[1] Benedict XVI, Homily, 29 April
2007.

[2] Saint John Paul II, Homily, 27 April
1980.

[3] Francis, *Regina Caeli*, 21 April 2013.

[4] Francis, *Regina Caeli*, 25 April 2021.

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] Saint Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no.
22.

[7] Saint Josemaría, *While He Spoke to
Us on the Way*, no. 279.

[8] Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Sup. Ev.
Ioann. in loc.*

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