

10. December 2019

“True shepherds”

Isa 40, 1-11

'Console my people, console them,' says your God. 'Speak to the heart of Jerusalem and cry to her that her period of service is ended, that her guilt has been atoned for, that, from the hand of Yahweh, she has received double punishment for all her sins.' A voice cries, 'Prepare in the desert a way for Yahweh. Make a straight highway for our God across the wastelands. Let every valley be filled in, every mountain and hill be levelled, every cliff become a plateau, every escarpment a plain; then the glory of Yahweh will be revealed and all humanity will see it together, for the mouth of Yahweh has spoken.' A voice said, 'Cry aloud!' and I said, 'What shall I cry?' -'All humanity is grass and all its beauty like the wild flowers. The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of Yahweh blows on them. (The grass is surely the people.) The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God remains for ever.' Go up on a high mountain, messenger of Zion. Shout as loud as you can, messenger of Jerusalem! Shout fearlessly, say to the towns of Judah, 'Here is your God.' Here is Lord Yahweh coming with power, his arm maintains his authority, his reward is with him and his prize precedes him. He is like a shepherd feeding his flock, gathering lambs in his arms, holding them against his breast and leading to their rest the mother ewes.

With the coming of the Messiah, as we look to the people of God, we can extend our gaze to all those who have received the message of salvation and entered into a living relationship with God. The Church, which has welcomed many peoples, is the place where the redeemed gather and praise the Lord.

The Lord has made his word true, that as the good shepherd he also gathers those who are not from the same stable. *"I have other sheep that are not of this stable, and I must guide them, and they will listen to my voice, and there will be only one flock and one shepherd."* (Jn 10,16)

So Jesus sent his messengers all over the world to bring them the message of salvation. As Jerusalem is reassured in today's text that the sojourn is coming to an end, it is now possible to call to all peoples that their slavery is over. They no longer have to serve idols and remain in darkness, not be misled by false doctrines.

They are no longer the slaves of sin, but the Lord has redeemed them and called them into the kingdom of the beloved Son of God.

“‘Console my people, console them,’ says your God. ‘Speak to the heart of Jerusalem’”

Proclaim to all peoples that the Messiah has paid her debt on the cross in Jerusalem and has become the way through the desert. Everyone can walk on him and get home if he accepts the offer of mercy. Through the deserts and steppes of life they do not need to go alone, but the Lord will always be with them and never leave them!

In the comforting image of the Good Shepherd, the Lord describes his ministry, knowing how to guide everyone. The little ones need especially his tender closeness, the ewes his gentle guidance, others a strong hand. What the gospel says to us today is valid for all times to describe a true shepherd, *“What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray?”* (Mt 18,12)

The good shepherd gives his life for the sheep and does not flee when he sees the wolf coming (cf. Jn 10,11-12). He not only rented the sheep and did use them for himself as bad shepherds. For Him the peoples are not to increase the own supposed greatness, as it will be with an Antichrist who cares nothing for humans. Although he may wear sheep clothes and look like a good shepherd, he is bad inside. He cares nothing about the sheep, he is not filled with the Spirit of the Lord, he does not give them a good pasture. He does not really love God and people, even if it looks like that outwardly. Instead of good pasture, he will offer bad pastures to them, instead of teaching them that only God can fill the soul, he will offer them a false "World religion". He will relativize sin and no longer call man to true repentance and conversion. So he will offer them "false consolations", something that flatters the person.

The good shepherd, on the other hand, will not flatter them, he will not relativize sin. He will proclaim the true mercy that always carries the "saving truth" in her lap. He will not withhold the fullness of the gospel from the sheep, and will proclaim only that joy that comes when life is in accordance with God's will. He will not rest in his messengers until all men have received the message of salvation and he has become the shepherd of all nations.

In the sign of the second coming of Christ, all those who truly recognize the Lord and serve him, are invited to become shepherds of those who are still lost, who do not know the good pastures of God, or who have to be content with sparse grass.

The disciples of the Lord must receive the smell of the Good Shepherd, the fragrance of Christ. His life must be reflected in them, and the way of the good heavenly shepherd become recognizable in them. Then they can take care of all those who God entrusts to them. Love and wisdom will become the infallible compass and thus one becomes the messenger of joy and raises ones voice in the authority of God.

People need the saving message of Christ. It must not be relativized or mutilated. Only the Lord can truly satisfy their hunger and thirst. We owe it to the love of our Redeemer not to rest until we have done our part, that the Lord may find his flock and lead it to the pastures of eternal life.