

26. April 2021

“The voice of the Lord”

Jn 10:1-10

'In all truth I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold through the gate, but climbs in some other way, is a thief and a bandit. He who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the flock; the gatekeeper lets him in, the sheep hear his voice, one by one he calls his own sheep and leads them out. When he has brought out all those that are his, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow because they know his voice. They will never follow a stranger, but will run away from him because they do not recognise the voice of strangers.' Jesus told them this parable but they failed to understand what he was saying to them. So Jesus spoke to them again: *In all truth I tell you, I am the gate of the sheepfold. All who have come before me are thieves and bandits, but the sheep took no notice of them. I am the gate. Anyone who enters through me will be safe: such a one will go in and out and will find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full.*

We cannot enter the Kingdom of God without passing through that door which the Father has given us in His Son Jesus Christ. He is both the one who passes through the door - that is, the Shepherd of the sheep - and also the door itself.

An essential condition for entering the Kingdom of Heaven is the forgiveness of sins, i.e. deliverance from that which separates us from God, thanks to the great gift of Redemption.

This is not the right time to question whether those who do not know Jesus, or who have not heard enough about Him, are condemned or not. This is a different case, and we can be certain that God will judge each person's life with mercy and justice. Moreover, we can assume that each person meets Christ after death, for He descended to the kingdom of the dead, into hell, as we say in the Creed. Could not those who did not know Him in life meet Him there, if He is the door to the Kingdom of heaven?

But in the situation presented to us today in John's Gospel, Jesus is addressing people who see and hear Him, and who also knew about His works. He wants to make them understand that the encounter with Him is life, the answer to all their searches and concerns, the fulfilment of their expectation of the Messiah.

Jesus speaks in a very personal way to those who were listening to Him, making them realise that He is addressing each one of them in particular. It is not simply a flock so large that it is impossible to know each sheep; it is not a crowd robotically following its guide - not so in the Kingdom of heaven! God addresses each one personally, looks at him and calls him by name.

I remember an experience from the time of my conversion. I took part in a prayer group in which biblical quotations were distributed to the participants. I got the word: "*I have called you by your name, you are mine.*" (*Isa 43:1b*) These words moved me deeply and at that moment I knew: "God is speaking to me, He knows me, He calls me by name".

That is what the Lord says today: He knows everyone, and those who listen to His voice follow Him. But how can we distinguish the voice of the Lord from so many other voices? Evidently the Lord foresees that there will come some who are not good shepherds and have evil intentions, and even warns of such.

On the one hand, we must become more and more familiar with the voice of the Lord through the reading of Holy Scripture. Every word is important, especially the New Testament and particularly the Gospels. We know that the Word of God does not return to Him unfulfilled; it does what He sends it to do (*cf. Isa 55:11*), as long as we have an open heart and welcome it into our hearts.

In order to learn to recognise His voice within us, it is also important that we are in constant dialogue with the Lord and follow His guidance. It is the intimacy of the exchange of love, in friendship with Jesus, in trust... In short, living in a "heart-to-heart" relationship with the Lord.

His voice also resounds through the authentic Magisterium of the Church, which is a great gift to the faithful.

Moreover, the voice of the Lord can be perceived in the world, or through the needs of the poor....

In the events of history we can also recognise the voice of God, although often not as clearly as we hear it in the other points mentioned.

Let us be very careful and not allow ourselves to be misled, lest we fall into the hands of thieves and bandits. Such do not seek what God wants, but pursue their own interests.