

21. April 2024

Shepherds must be vigilant

Jn 10:11-18

At that time, Jesus said: 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.”

Although we may not see many flocks of sheep with their shepherds these days, we are still familiar with the image of the Good Shepherd. We know it well from Jesus Himself and also from those who, in Him, bear responsibility for the welfare of the faithful.

The Good Shepherd is the ultimate expression of protection and security for God's flock, because He lays down His life for the sheep and does not run away when He sees the wolf coming. For He loves His sheep, and if we call Jesus the Good Shepherd, then they belong to Him.

Those who are entrusted with the ministry of shepherding represent the Lord and are also called to lay down their lives for the flock, which is the Lord's property. Thank God, we have many examples of such shepherds in the history of our Church.

On the other hand, those whom the Lord calls "hirelings" act differently. They do what they have to do, but they do not take inner responsibility for the flock and therefore do not pay attention to the dangers that might threaten the sheep. When the wolf comes, they make themselves safe. They have not established a bond of love with the flock that

goes beyond their own interests. They do not care more for the good of the other than for their own.

Only in God can we find the complete security of knowing that we are protected by the Good Shepherd. Human beings, no matter how good their intentions, can falter.

The Pope, bishops and priests are the first to be entrusted with the service of shepherding in imitation of the Good Shepherd, but they are not the only ones. They must first of all protect the flock from false doctrine and, in a spirit of discernment, recognise where the wolf is entering to confuse the flock. They must recognise the wolf as a wolf and not mistake it for a sheep. Indeed, one consequence of tolerating false doctrine is the scattering of the flock.

This is true not only of the teachings and tendencies that come from the world and try to infiltrate the Church, but the vigilance of pastors is especially necessary to identify and counteract errors within the Church. St Paul is a good example for us in this regard, since he fought resolutely against any alteration of doctrine (cf. e.g. Gal 1:6-9).

In addition to combating heresy, pastors must always proclaim the faith clearly, aware that every utterance or comment they make, whether official or unofficial, has an impact on the faithful and on the world.

Jesus speaks of "*one flock, one shepherd*". This will be fulfilled when he gathers people from all nations and unites them in Himself.

The deepest foundation of true unity among human beings can only be found in Jesus, the Good Shepherd. We must always keep this in mind in order to counteract vain attempts to create unity apart from the Lord. In His Church, Jesus has entrusted to us the treasure of faith in all its fullness, so that, through the proclamation of the Gospel to all peoples, the unity of the flock may become a reality in her, as the Lord wills. This most important ministry of evangelisation has been entrusted to all Christians, each according to the gifts and talents that God has given him or her and according to the circumstances of his or her life.