

10. February 2025

THE GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN
“One flock and one Shepherd”

Jn 10:11-21

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.” There was again a division among the Jews because of these words. Many of them said, “He has a demon, and he is mad; why listen to him?” Others said, “These are not the sayings of one who has a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?”

The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. This is the crucial difference with the hireling. The latter does not care about the sheep. If we interpret this parable of Jesus considering the people as the sheep, we could say that the hireling does not have a loving relationship with the people that would commit him to take care of them. When he sees the wolf coming, he fears for his life and abandons the sheep to their fate. In the worst case, he even allies himself with the wolves and adopts their traits.

The bond that unites the Lord with His sheep is so deep that He could never abandon them. His Father has given them to Him as a precious treasure and He does not want any of them to be lost. How could He want that? God's promises are unbreakable and marked by His seal. Despite the unfaithfulness of His people, our Heavenly Father never broke His covenant with us. His Son even sealed it with His own blood.

Jesus enters into an intimate relationship with His own. From there, there is this mutual knowledge between the sheep and the Shepherd, and also between all those who follow Him. It is a mutual recognition: we know that we are recognised by the Lord and, at the same time, we know Him ever more deeply. This means that we come to know His heart, that we not only assimilate His desires for our own way of following Him and for the whole of humanity, but that these become our own desires.

In the true love that Jesus gives us and that makes our response to Him also a true love, there is that union with Him that will be indestructible, as long as we remain faithful to Him.

Surely not all His listeners, both then and now, can immediately understand His words. Even His disciples often needed a more detailed explanation from the Lord about what He had spoken in public. But it is not necessary to understand everything either. What is essential is that people trust in the Lord and allow themselves to be touched by the truth of His words and works, as well as by the divinity of His Person. If this happens, they will receive the Spirit of the Lord, who will continue to instruct them and make them understand more and more what the Lord wants to tell them.

Then Jesus pronounces these words which will mark the future: *“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”*.

Jesus came to unite all mankind in Himself. The Church, the faithful Bride of Christ, received this commission from Him. As His disciples, we know what this means. Through the proclamation of the Gospel and the building up of His Church, the Lord wants to unite Jews and Gentiles into one body, with Himself as its head. All people are to experience salvation. Jesus never relinquished this imperative, nor can the Church abandon this task or relativise it by adapting it to the spirit of the times. Just as God's faithfulness is unshakeable, so is the mission He entrusts to us.

Once again, Jesus utters a phrase that we must learn to understand in depth: He lays down His life for the sheep. That is the mandate He has received from His Father. But He gives it freely. Jesus is not at the mercy of the circumstances that befall Him. He Himself determines the hour of His death. He gives His life and, by virtue of His divinity, He can take it up again. This will happen later, when He rises from the dead.

When Jesus said all this in front of the Jews, those who did not want to understand it interpreted it as madness caused by demon possession and warned the others not to listen to Him.

However, Jesus announces the wisdom of God and all that the heavenly Father had prepared for His beloved children. They were not all carried away by suspicions against Jesus, but confessed, *'These are not the sayings of one who has a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?'*