

21 April 2024 -- 4th Sunday of Easter "B

[Acts 4:8-12; 1 John 3:1-2; John 10:11-18](#)

Homily

This Gospel tells us about the Good Shepherd. "Good shepherd" is the usual translation. And yet the original Greek text should be translated, literally, as: "I am the beautiful shepherd" ('*o poimèn 'o kalós*), as Cardinal Martini of Milan reminded us some twenty years ago in an admirable pastoral letter on the beauty that will save the world. In reality, there is not much difference between the two translations, because what is truly beautiful is what is good and true. That's the difference between a real rose and a plastic flower, between a genuine person and someone trying to deceive by playing a role. When we meet someone whose generosity, love and faithfulness are admirable, don't we say: "What a beautiful person!", and when someone tells us a particularly touching story, don't we say: "What a beautiful story! Well, it is in this sense that Jesus is a "beautiful shepherd". He uses this image to describe the nature of his relationship with us.

First of all, he underlines the difference between a true shepherd, to whom the sheep belong, and a hired hand. The difference between the two is particularly apparent in times of danger, when a wolf appears, for example. The true shepherd is prepared to risk his life; the hired man thinks only of saving his own.

The second characteristic of the "beautiful shepherd", as Jesus points out, is the mutual knowledge between him and his sheep. To a stranger looking at a flock of sheep, they are all the same; but the true shepherd distinguishes one from another and knows each one by name. And Jesus goes much further than this image suggests. He affirms that this mutual knowledge between him and his disciples is of the same nature as the mutual knowledge between him and his Father. This knowledge is not theoretical and intellectual; it is of the order of love and is such that we are ready to lay down our lives for the one we love. This is how we are called to know him.

Finally, Jesus speaks of sheep that belong to him but do not belong to this sheepfold. Even if they are not from the same fold, they are "his" and he must also guide them. The day will come, at a time that no one knows or can foresee, when there will be one flock and one shepherd.

In the first apostolic sermon, a few days after the Resurrection, the images intertwine and complement each other. While,

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speaking to the Galilean , Jesus used the image that spoke most to them -- that of the shepherd -- Peter, speaking to the city-dwellers of Jerusalem, used another image, that of a building. To the leaders of the people and the elders, he affirms that Jesus is the stone which they, the builders, rejected and which has become the cornerstone. All salvation, even Peter's healing of the lame man who was only asking for alms, comes from him.

As for the Apostle John, writing his letter in the evening of his life, he is still fascinated by this mutual knowledge, the fruit of the Father's love for us. All the beauty of our condition as children of God -- a condition that is already ours -- will be revealed when Jesus appears in his glory and we see him as he is, without veils.

Only this intimacy with Jesus in a mutual knowledge can give us the strength to be his witnesses, even to the point of martyrdom if necessary. Even today, many pastors risk their lives, and sometimes give them for their people. Let us pray in a special way on this day for all those who, imitating the "beautiful shepherd" of the Gospel, dedicate themselves even to the point of risking their lives in the service and defence of those entrusted to them, whether they be fathers and mothers, or political or religious leaders. Let us also pray that all those who have been entrusted with such responsibilities will resist the temptation to act like mercenaries for whom the sheep do not count.

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