

Today we celebrate the 4th Sunday of the Easter Season. During this post Easter time we see a major difference in the behavior of the Apostles. We also realize that there is a thin line between Faith/Fear and Blessings/Burdens. Thirdly we see how Apostles developed a Spirituality expressed by bold and strong Faith to model their ministry after Jesus, telling them he is the Good Shepherd and each one of them must do ministry as a Good Shepherd. The Glimpse of My Heart will focus on the Good Shepherd. The next 2 paragraphs below will supply a little theological and biblical background, the Apostles grew and began to build a strong spirituality for their ministry leading up to the gospel for this Sunday, the Good Shepherd.

After the Resurrection, the Apostles seem to be courageous, bold, celebrate prayerful worship services even though they were forbidden. Rhetorically they said, it is better to obey God than the authorities. As they moved around they were willing to be imprisoned, experience hardships, and deal with conflicts and major theological disputes; in the end Our Risen Savior challenged them to be witnesses to the end and even suffer death that they did.

In the experience of the Transfiguration we see the thin line between Faith/Fear. Peter, James and John chosen to accompany Jesus were Faith filled, saying it is good for us to be here. For them there was no fear, but for the others, they were fearful because they could not heal the person possessed by demons. For them that was very burdensome, so they asked Jesus why they could not drive out the demon/demons. He responded this one is done by fasting and prayer.

In today's gospel, Jesus combines the guidelines of Ezekiel and the personal testimony of King David, He proceeds to tell the Apostles, He is the Good Shepherd and why He is the Good Shepherd. The shepherd – concept is a fixture in the Scripture; they announced the birth of the New Born Savior, the prophet Ezekiel outlines the responsibilities of the Shepherd; King David describes how the Lord is his personal shepherd. In our gospel today Jesus tells and describes to us why He is the Good Shepherd.

Jesus begins by saying, I am the good shepherd; one may be lost, injured, marginalized, an outcast and in darkness; I have given my life for you so that you can return, live in light, in grace, be accepted, build and develop a spiritual life that provides the courage to resist evil. Whenever evil or the demons (the wolf) come as the Good Shepherd, I will be present with support and compassion because we have a relationship; I know you and you know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; I give my life for you!

Ezekiel tells us the shepherd seeks what was lost and no matter how difficult and grueling this painful ordeal might be. He will continue to search until he finds what was lost. As the good shepherd, he lays down his life for us; with courage, he stands up and protects us. When danger comes, he does not escape like a coward and runs away because he has come to fulfill the mission of His Father. Unlike the hired hand who works for pay He does not.

A relationship with the Good Shepherd is one of our core life relationships. In John's gospel the axiom is quite clear no one comes to the Father but through me. This relationship is at the foundation of our spiritual journey of Faith. The door of faith is always open. It is through that door (baptism) that we begin our journey. I have outlined a few elements that are most critical in this relationship. They are the following:

- 1) Trust: Trust connects us to the Good Shepherd.
- 2) Communication: In prayer we have our conversations.
- 3) Commitment: Assuring the good shepherd our word is our bond.
- 4) Witness: We are a witness to his Word until the end, (like the Apostles and Martyrs).
- 5) Love: The New Commandment: Love God, My neighbor and Personal Self-love: this is our ultimate challenge,
the New Commandment!

In speaking about those who have a relationship with him, the Good Shepherd is also aware and reminds us that he has others who do not belong to this fold, these he must lead, and eventually hear his voice, then in the end there will be one flock and one shepherd.

Hopefully like the Apostles, we can continue to grow spiritually and understand that our relationship with the Good Shepherd is critical and central because there is a thin line between Faith and Fear, and Blessings and Burdens. He gives us the faith to not let fear be the background music of our lives and the blessings so we have the courage to respond to the burdens we meet along the way.

As I conclude, let us continue to deepen and solidify our relationship with the Good Shepherd. But also let us realize that the value of our life does not depend on the space we occupy, but it depends on how we occupy that space.