

IV EASTER – May 11<sup>th</sup>, 2014

## I AM THE DOOR OF THE SHEEP – Biblical Commentary by F. Alberto Maggi OSM

*Jn 10,1-10*

***"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.***

***A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers." This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. So Jesus again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.***

For having opened the eyes of a blindman from birth, Jesus is considered by the religious leaders as an enemy of God, a sinner. So now, Jesus speaks to them directly, Jesus speaks to the Pharesees in chapter 10 of John's Gospel, describing the so called shepherds of Israel with the same characteristics of wolves. Like wolves, in fact, they are robbers and bandits.

Robbers because they take that which is not theirs, and bandits because they use violence to control the people. But let's see this important passage of John 's that contains a very severe warning to those that pretend to be the shepherds of the people.

Jesus declares openly that all those that have claimed to be the guides of the people, are bandits – they have used violence – and are robbers because they have taken the flock that was God's, certainly not theirs. Now Jesus appears, the legitimate shepherd.

And the legitimate shepherd is described as the one who *"..enters by the door"* and *"the sheep hear his voice"* .Why sheep? The flock is the image of the people. Why do they listen to His voice? Because the people recognize in the words of Jesus the answer of God to the need of a fullness of life that each person carries inside. This is the force of Jesus' message. Well, when one listens to this voice, one sees in

Jesus' message his own need for the fullness of life, Jesus establishes a personal report with each one, *"...he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out."*

The word "lead" is the same as used in the Old Testament for indicating the Exodus. That of Jesus is a liberation, take the flock out of the fold, from the influence of the Jewish religious institution, not to be enclosed in another fold, but to give to them the full freedom. In fact, the evangelist writes, that when Jesus *"...has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice."*

What maintains the faith to the teachings of Jesus, is that in the voice of Jesus there is the answer to the needs of mankind. Therefore Jesus does not enclose the sheep in another fold, but gives them freedom. Then, more than a realization, it is advice that Jesus seems to give, *"A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him,..."*

To flee, this is the advice that Jesus gives. Flee from those that seem to be shepherds, in reality they are wolves. And, as them, bring only destruction. Why do they flee from him ? *"..they do not know the voice of strangers."* The sheep, the flock, the people know the voice of who loves them, but not the voice of who wants to exploit them. Why are they strangers? Because they do not listen to the voice of the people, they are not near the people. So here, is why they do not listen to their voice, because they do not have anything to say to them.

Well then, the evangelist comments, *"This figure of speech Jesus used with them"*, to the Pharisees, very clear and very severe, *" but they did not understand what he was saying to them "*. Why do they not understand? Because they are not His sheep. They do not have the desire for the fullness of life. Naturally, they are not deaf, but they are obstinate. They understand that, if they welcome Jesus' message, they will lose all their power, their prestige and also the power to dominate, they must put themselves, as Jesus is doing, at the service of others. And this the authority, the leaders, the Pharisees, do not want.

They want to be able to dominate the people, not serve them. So, Jesus, seeing that they have not understood, again in a rough and clear way, so He says *" « I am the door of the sheep. »"*, and Jesus states *"«All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. »"*

The population can be suppressed by fear, but not by choice. The population may be dominated, subjugated, but when finally they listen to the message of freedom, listen to a message of love. Here is when the population is reborn. Therefore Jesus is sure that the people have never listened to Him. They have forced their message, but they have not convinced them.

Jesus does not impose the message, because His words are convincing. This is the characteristic that distinguishes the message that comes from God and that which does not come from God: first it is offered, because it is a message of love and love can be only offered, never enforced. The message of the religious authority is enforced, it is a doctrine that is enforced, why? Because the leaders are the first to not believe in its benefits.

If something is good there is no need to enforce it. And Jesus continues, claiming again to be the door, a door that does not close. Jesus says: “*«If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out. »*”. Jesus did not come to enclose us in another fold, but to give complete freedom, because, only where there is complete freedom there is dignity and the fullness of mankind.

And here the evangelist writes that they will “*« ..find pasture. »*” And uses the word pasture that in Greek is *nomè* , very like the word *nomos*, which means “laws”. In Jesus one does not find the doctrine to observe, but a pasture, love that aliments the life of the people. And again the final conclusion, “*«The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. »*” therefore Jesus associates the shepherds to robbers. Those that seem to be shepherds that should defend the flock from the wolves, are worse than the wolves, because one fears the wolves but trusts the shepherds.

And, Jesus concludes: “*« I came that they may have life and have it abundantly»*”. The leaders of the people are in possession of the people, taking them to ruin. They are those that in the name of God, have used the people, sacrificing them for their ambitions, for their thirst for power, insensible to sacrifice that they impose and the sufferance that it causes.

But now Jesus has come it is His message it is the answer of God to the needs of the fullness of life that each person carries inside. And when one hears this voice, all the rest loses importance.