

IV SUNDAY AFTER EASTER – 17th April 2016

**MY SHEEP..... I GIVE THEM ETERNAL LIFE - Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM**

***John 10,27-30***

***My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.***

***I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.***

***My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one.”***

Every time that Jesus, the son of God and also God himself, find themselves in the temple of Jerusalem, the most sacred place on earth, the most saintly place in Jerusalem, the place where it was believed that there was the presence of God himself, well, every time that Jesus finds himself in the temple it is always a situation of conflict. In the reading we will see the last time that Jesus finds himself in the temple, in the sanctuary of Jerusalem and this time they actually try to stone him.

Let's see what happens. We must put these few verses of today's reading in a much wider context from that which the evangelist puts them. It is one of the most important Israeli festival, the celebration of the dedication, the rededication of the temple, started by Judas Maccabeus in 165 B.C.

For the occasion an enormous candelabra was lit and it was called the festival of light. Clearly there was conflict between this festival of light and Jesus who presented himself as the light of the world. As already said.

In fact Jesus entering the temple is immediately surrounded by the authority that ask him literally . “How long will you keep us in suspense? ( John 10, 24) Jesus' mission of the reconstruction of the life of the people means to take it away the from the authority that dominates them. Well, Jesus this time says to the religious authority, the representatives of God, some very harsh words. He says: “...you do not believe because you are not among my sheep.” ( John 10, 26) Jesus presents himself as a real shepherd sent by God to gather the people, the flock, yet Jesus says that there are some that are not part of this flock.

It's the religious authority, the spiritual leaders, those that believed the right to be nearest to God, that Jesus says are excluded. And here are the verses that the liturgy presents to us. Jesus states: "*My sheep..*," therefore Jesus underlines once again that the sheep are his, he is the true shepherd, because the shepherd is he who gives his own life for his sheep. "*My sheep hear my voice,..*" Jesus' voice, that is the voice of God, is God's reply to the fullness of God that every person carries inside. That which characterises Jesus' voice is that the message of love that is not enforced, but is offered, simply proposed.

*"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them,..*" it is important the use of the verb "to know". It indicates a very intimate and profound knowledge of his flock. *"...and they follow me."* They follow him because they find in Jesus the answer to the real ideal of life, something they do not find in the leaders, because Jesus had said: *".. believe the works,"* ( John 10 , 38) But they cannot believe in his works because Jesus' works are all designed to restore life to the people. And they are the ones that suffocate this life.

Jesus continues: *"I give them eternal life,"* This is a theme dear to the evangelist. Eternal life is not a merit but it is a gift on the behalf of God and it is called eternal not so much for the length, indefinite, but for the quality, that is indestructible.

*"..and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand."* Here Jesus gives a very severe warning, very clear to the religious authority that are not tempted to snatch these sheep from his hand. He will be the shepherd that will give his life for his sheep. *My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all,..*" This is the verse that is the most difficult and complex. There are a good five variants because the problem is to understand what is the greatest, the Father or the flock?

The sense, the significance, basically does not change. We propose the version in which the greatest , the most important is the flock, that the Father had given to the son. Therefore the Father that had given these people to Jesus, is greatest gift that he could give. And if Jesus at first had spoken of his hand, that no one could snatch from his hand, now he says *"...and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand."* Therefore it is not possible to distinguish between Jesus and God as the religious authority do. Jesus and God are the same thing.

And the flock is in Jesus' hand that is the hand of the Father. And no one tries to robe this flock as the religious authority had done. And here is the phrase that will be fatal, a blasphemy, immediately after they will want to lynch Jesus, to stone him. Jesus says: *"I and the Father are one."*

One in the symbology of the bible is the number that indicates divinity. Jesus is saying the he and God, as the Father is God. *"I and the Father are one."* This is an unsupportable blasphemy. The evangelist here realises what he had written at the beginning of his gospel in the prologue when he had said that no one had seen God, only the son is the revelation. Jesus is not one sent by God, Jesus is not a prophet of god, Jesus is the visible manifestation on earth of what God is.

Here is why Jesus says: *"I and the Father are one."* So after this the mayhem happens. The evangelist writes that the authority, the leaders, pick up stones to stone him and the motive is: *"It is not for a good*

*work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God.”( John 10, 33 )*

God’s project for humanity, was that every creature became his son and had his same divine life, for the religious authority that must make know this project to the people, it was a real blasphemy to punish with death.