

IV SUNDAY OF EASTER– 21st April 2013

“I GIVE THEM (MY SHEEP) ETERNAL LIFE” – Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

Jn 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.”

The last time Jesus presents Himself in the Temple of Jerusalem the religious authority try to kill Him because they accuse Him of being a blasphemer. To understand the few verses of the reading today, John chapter 10 ,27-30, we must place them in the context. What is the context?

It is that of the Dedication feast, of the consecration of the temple. So there is conflict between Jesus, the true temple from which radiates love, mercy, the Father’s compassion, and the temple of Jerusalem where the true God is called, convenience, interest and money.

The religious authority surround Jesus and ask Him, literally, *“How long will you keep us in suspense?”* What does this mean? Jesus ‘ work is to give life to mankind – Jesus had said that He Himself would give life so that mankind would have it in full – meaning to take it from the religious institution that claims to subdue and dominate mankind.

They ask Jesus if He is truly the Messiah. Jesus replies that the credibility of His actions depends on the works, *“The works that I do in my Father’s name bear witness about me”* (John 10, 24)The works that Jesus does are all actions that prolong the activity of the Father creator, that communicate life to mankind, gives back and enriches the life of mankind , the works are that which judge whether a person comes from God or not, not the theory nor the doctrine.

When works communicate life the actions of the individual come without doubt from God because God is the author of life. And Jesus denounces them: *“...you do not believe because you are not among my sheep.”* (John 10,26) they are tremendous words. Jesus’ accusation is very grave: if they are not part of His sheep, of God’s flock, it means that they are robbers, thieves or murderous wolves.

Therefore Jesus is denouncing the highest religious authority that do not form part of the flock, God’s people, but are his mortal enemies.

And here are the verses presented to us in the liturgy. *"My sheep hear my voice,.."* Why do they hear Jesus' voice? Because Jesus' message is not imposed, but is offered. Jesus does not force, but proposes, and His message is God's reply to the needs of the fullness of life that every person feels deep inside themselves. *"..and I know them,"*- the verb "to know" means a profound knowledge, intimate knowledge – *"... and they follow me."*

Why do they follow Him? Because they trust Him. They trust the shepherd that is ready to give his life for his flock. And Jesus continues *" I give them eternal life,"* Following Jesus, therefore orientating one's own life – like Jesus – for the good of mankind, to collaborate with Him in the creative actions of rebuilding life, brightening life and communicating that life to others, to see that the person has in himself a life of such quality that it is indestructible.

Who works for the life of others has a life so full that even death does not touch them. *".. and they will never perish,"*, assures Jesus. Then Jesus warns the religious authority to not tempt to take back the flock that he has liberated: *"....and no one will snatch them out of my hand."* Therefore Jesus is warning the religious authority to not take back the people that He is liberating.

"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." Jesus had spoken of a flock in His hands, now it is in the hands of the Father. Jesus and the Father are one, as Jesus himself confirms: *"I and the Father are one."*

Jesus claims the divine condition. It 's a blasphemy! Jesus has blasphemed, we are in the temple and the text continues: "The Jews picked up stones again to stone him." Jesus in replies in a very ironic way: " Jesus answered them, *"I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?* The Jews answered him, "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."

The evangelist's allegation is very serious and grave. The highest religious authority, those who should of made known God's will to the people, when this will manifests itself in Jesus –and God's will is in every man, through the practice of a love, like His, becomes his son – they think of it as a blasphemy, a crime that is punishable by death.

So the evangelist's allegation is tremendous. From the religious authority God's project seems like an attack. A what? They are those that dominate the people, the Lord is he who liberates them, they are those that command, the Lord is he who serves. So we see in God's project realized in Jesus a complaint to their lifestyle. God is love that puts itself to the serve of mankind, however those that claim to represent it are those that submit and dominate mankind. And Jesus tries to make them understand yet again, because the offer of love Jesus gives also to the enemy and says: *"..even though you do not believe me, believe the works,"*. The works are the criterion of the authenticity of the person.

But nothing doing. As said: *"...you are not among my sheep."* And do not hear God's voice, and neither that of Jesus. "Again they sought to arrest him, but he escaped from their hands." So Jesus' action, that manifests God's design for each man, for the religious

authority is an attack to their security and they always try to get rid of Him and contradict Him. But they have nothing against Jesus or those that are entrusted to Him.