

## IV SUNDAY OF EASTER – 3rd May 2020

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

#### John 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 opening the eyes of the man born blind, Jesus was accused of being a sinner because for the Pharisees sin is the transgression of the divine law. Well, Jesus replies, stating that they are the sinners, because, for Jesus, sin is what offends man. Jesus addresses the warning, which is contained in the tenth chapter of John's Gospel ; he addresses it to the Pharisees of the time, but also to those of today. Let's hear what the evangelist writes for us.

“Truly, truly...” when this expression is used in the John's gospel it means: I assure you, I tell you firmly, “I say to you...” - so this is directed to the Pharisees – “.. he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. ” Jesus is very clear when talking to the Pharisees. In the background of the denunciation of Jesus there is all the accusation that the prophet Ezekiel, especially in chapter 34, makes to the shepherds, who govern the flock only for their own interest, for their convenience, and are not interested in the good and the welfare of the sheep

And Jesus continues “*But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.*” Jesus claims to be, like God, the true shepherd of his people, “*To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice...*” Why do sheep listen to his voice? Because they recognize, in the voice of Jesus, the response to the need, to the desire for fullness of life, which each person carries within. “*..and he calls his own sheep by name..*” Jesus does not have a relationship with the crowd, with the mass, with a flock, but Jesus has a special relationship with each individual, with each sheep. “*..and leads them out.*” the verb used by the evangelist is the one that was used in the book of Exodus to indicate the liberation from slavery, towards the land of freedom. “*When he has brought out all his own,...*” - already in the episode of the entry into Jerusalem, Jesus had driven the sheep out of the temple. “*..he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.*” Jesus frees the sheep from the enclosure of the religious institution, but does not close them in another enclosure, even better, he grants them full freedom.

And Jesus continues “*A stranger they will not follow...*” This is not an observation , it is advice that Jesus gives; “*.. but they will flee from him...*” - one must run away from those who present themselves as shepherds, but we will see, that they are only rapacious wolves – “*.. for they do not*

*know the voice of strangers.*” The sheep know the voice of those who love them and not those who want to exploit them, they recognize, in the voice of the false shepherds, the anxiety of power and domination. “*This figure of speech Jesus used with them,..*”- the Pharisses - “*..but they did not understand what he was saying to them.*” How can they not understand? Simple, because they are not his sheep, because they are not deaf, but they are obstinate in their temptation to power, to ambition.

“*So Jesus again said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am...”* and this is the claim of the name of God, therefore the fullness of the divine condition manifested in Jesus, “*I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers,..*” Then Jesus reiterates the accusation against religious leaders of having seized the flock that belonged to God - God was the shepherd - and of having subdued it through violence. “*..but the sheep did not listen to them.*” here is the Jesus’ observation : the people may have been subdued by fear, but not by their own choice.

“*I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out..*” This entering and leaving means that Jesus does not close the flock into another enclosure, and the door does not come closed. Closing the door indicates security for the flock, but a lack of freedom; no, following Jesus, there is full freedom, one enters and exits. “*.. and find..*” - and here the evangelist plays on the Greek language –“*... pasture.*” pasture, in the Greek language, is called “*nome*”, while law is called “*nomos*”. With Jesus, there is no law to obey, but pasture is found, that is, a food that gives life.

And the conclusion, Jesus uses the same characteristics of the wolves for these self-styled shepherds, so they are not shepherds, but they are wolves, you have to be careful: “*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.*” And here is the echo of the accusation that the prophet Ezekiel had already made, in chapter 22, 27: “*Her princes in her midst are like wolves tearing the prey, shedding blood, destroying lives to get dishonest gain.*” So Jesus identifies these shepherds as wolves, so you have to be careful, you have to run away. The real victims of temple worship are the people .” *I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.*” So it is an invitation of Jesus to free oneself from these shepherds, who impose and oblige, and to accept the gift of the fullness of life that Jesus offers unconditionally, to every person who listens to his voice.