

IV SUNDAY OF EASTER— 7th MAY 2017

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.”

When Jesus opened the eyes of the blind man, he had been accused of being a sinner, because, for them, a sin was the transgression of the divine law. Well, Jesus replies, stating that they, the Pharisees are the sinners. For Jesus, a sin is that which offends mankind, and it is to the Pharisees that Jesus directs the warning, found in John's gospel, chapter ten. He speaks to the Pharisees of that time, but also of those today. Let's hear what the evangelist wrote.

“Truly, truly,..” when this expression is used in John's gospel it means: I assure you, I say to you firmly, *“I say to you,”* so he is talking to the Pharisees, *“..he who does not enter the sheepfold.”* Attention: he is not referring to the fold and the sheep as such, but to the people and the religious institution. *“..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, he is speaking to the Pharisees: you are thieves, because you have taken over the people of God. Jesus was the God, the true shepherd and above all you are robbers, because you have used violence to subdue these people. In Jesus' denouncement that is the accusation of the prophet Ezekiel, *How I hate the shepherds of Israel who care only for themselves! Should not a shepherd care for his sheep?”* (ch. 34,2)

And Jesus continues: *“But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.”* Jesus claims to be, as God, the true shepherd of his people, *“To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice,”* Why do the sheep listen to his voice? Because they recognised, in Jesus' voice, the answer to the needs of the desires of the fullness of life, that every person carries inside. *“..and he calls his own sheep by name..”* Jesus does not have a relationship with the crowd like a herd, but he has a special relationship with every individual, with each sheep *“..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.”* He leads them out of the confinement of the religious institution, but he does not close them in another enclosure, even better, he gives them full freedom.

Jesus continues: *“A stranger they will not follow,..”* this is not a statement, but advice that Jesus gives. *“..but they will flee from him,”* you must run away from those who present themselves as shepherds, we see that they are only savage wolves, *“..for they do not know the voice of strangers.”* The sheep recognise only the voice of those who love them, not of those who want to use them. They recognise, in the false voices, the anxiety of power and domination. *“This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.”* He speaks to the Pharisees that cannot understand him, because they are not his sheep, they are not deaf, but they are insistent in their temptation of power and ambition.

“So Jesus again said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am..” And this is the affirmation of God's name,

therefore the fullness of the divine condition that manifests itself in Jesus, *".. the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers.."* Then Jesus reaffirms the accusation to the religious leaders that they had taken possession of the flock that was God's, God was the shepherd, and that they had dominated them through violence. *"..but the sheep did not listen to them."* and here is Jesus' remark ; the people can be dominated because of fear, but not of their own choice.

"I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out..." this 'in and out' means that Jesus does not close the flock in another enclosure, the door is not closed, the closing of the door would mean security for the flock, but the lack of freedom. In following Jesus there is the full freedom.

"..and find pasture." So, with Jesus, there are no laws to obey, but a pasture that is "food" that gives life.

In conclusion Jesus uses for these so-called shepherds the same characteristics as the wolves, they are not shepherds, but wolves, attention must be taken. *"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy."* And here there is the same accusation that the prophet Ezekiel had already said *"Her princes in her midst are like wolves tearing the prey, shedding blood, destroying lives to get dishonest gain."* (22, 27)

So Jesus identifies these shepherds as wolves, so attention is needed, one must run away from them . The people are the true victims of the cult of the temple.

"I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." So Jesus' invitation is to break free from these shepherds, that compel and force and to accept the gift of the fullness of life, that he offers unconditionally to every person that listens to his voice.