

**May 12, 2019**

Acts 13:14,43-52; Rev 7:9, 14b-17; Jn 10:27-30

God has a great gift for all of us. A gift of life, a gift of peace, a gift of being able to share in God's own life - God holds this gift out to all of us, will we follow Jesus' voice and receive, or will we listen to many other competing voices and become lost?

There was once a young man that I know. He had had a rough life in a lot of ways, had been separated from his family when he was very little, as a young adult he was trying to make it in the world. He had the chance to build a relationship with a relative who really felt for him and cared for him. That person used to help him and give advice, and bail him out when he got in trouble, loan him money. The young man did not put into practice the advice he was given, and kept choosing to do things that called out to him with another voice, and he thought would bring quick fun - and in the process, he did not take care of some other things in life (like paying his bills). Over and over again the relative gave help and advice, and over and over again the young man would squander what he had giving things to people who really didn't love him to make them like him, or on buying some thing he didn't need just to make himself feel better - yet things really didn't get any better - and he was no more fulfilled. Eventually he and this relative began drifting apart, the relative continued to love him, but his choices were pushing this important person out of his life. He pushed out the source of his support who genuinely loved him and was trying to lead him to a better life - he heard this person's voice but did not follow.

God is like that relative. God continues to love us even when we mess up, continues to want to provide for us even when we don't use his gifts well. He is the shepherd that Jesus references in the Gospel - he calls out, he gives us the instructions, it is up for us to follow. God doesn't just wait for requests in order to give hand outs every time we ask for something - God is expecting us to follow the voice of Jesus and change for the better. Just giving us whatever we ask for, whenever we ask, makes us spoiled, unsatisfied people who always want something more - while at the same time we push away the source of the gifts. More and more, we start to give all our attention to the use of the gifts and not on the giver. Paul and Barnabas in our first reading continue to follow the voice of Jesus, continue to press on, even when they didn't get all they wanted. They see their difficulties as opportunities. They are the sheep who hear the voice of the shepherd to climb the mountain to be able to get to the beautiful meadow on the other side.

This is the essence of what we celebrated a few weeks ago. God came down in human form, without stopping being God, and suffered death for us only to rise again. God wants to give us all this gift of victory over sin and death, and he calls us to follow like sheep follow the shepherd. Just like the young man's relative, Jesus provides as much as we need and gives guidance to reach a pasture that leads to life. A good shepherd doesn't just say its ok to do whatever we want and let to walk off a cliff. Jesus says in the Gospel: *My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish.* We asked in the opening prayer of today's Mass for God to "lead us to a share of the joys of heaven, so that the humble flock may reach where the brave Shepherd has gone before." Listen to hear that voice, so that the Shepherd can lead you to where he has gone. Don't push away the advice and guidance Jesus gives, and become alienated from him. Listen ... God speaks to us in the words of scripture, in the events of our lives, by the comments of others, and through the teaching of the Church - what is God saying to you? The best pasture is not always where the sheep want it to be, sometimes it is on the other side of a rough patch of ground.

God wants us all to join those that we heard of in the second reading: *a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people, and tongue. They stood before the throne and before the lamb, wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands. They will not hunger or thirst anymore.* These individuals wearing the white robe of their baptism which they have kept clean by the goodness of their lives and through the Eucharist and Reconciliation, holding the palms by which symbolize the praise they offer to God that he is due. This is the company into which Jesus calls us, they are the ones who are truly happy.

Jesus wants us to follow him not because he just wants to tell us what to do. Even the young man I told you about knew that he was being told to do out of love. In God's love for us he knows that not following the shepherd and doing it our way eventually leads us to self-centeredness, being unsatisfied, and slowly being alienated from that God of love. Listen to the voice of Jesus calling you to a more faithful living out of your baptismal commitment so that you can be like those who will not hunger or thirst anymore. Call those you love to join you in a fuller participation in the life of encounter with Jesus in personal prayer and in the Eucharist. We can all rejoice that the shepherd has won the great victory by his resurrection and now goes ahead of us to lead us to a better life, what a great gift - a gift of life, a gift of peace. His sheep follow his voice knowing that where he leads us is to final and total fulfillment.