

Fourth Sunday of Easter (A)

May 11, 2014.

The Lord is my Shepherd; there is nothing I shall want (Ps. 23).

Today is Good Shepherd Sunday and the sacred liturgy invites us to celebrate the correspondence between the deepest longing of the human heart and the promise made to us that God will send a Shepherd who will give us the fullness of life. Our Lord declares, *I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly (Jn. 10:10)*. The Easter Season is a great, extended celebration of this gift of new life that has come to us through the Passion, Death and Resurrection of our Lord. Our Lord alone is the one who can heal the wound of sin that alienated man from God. As St. Peter teaches us in our second reading, *He himself bore our sins in his body upon the cross, so that free from sin, we might live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you had gone astray like sheep, but you have now returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls (1Pt. 2: 24-25)*. He does this through the reality of *vicariousness*, upon which the entire mystery of Christ is founded. His superabundant love saves us all. *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.... I know my own and my own know me, as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd (Jn. 10: 11, 14-16)*. These words of our Lord make it abundantly clear that His salvific will is universal; the *other sheep that are not of this fold* is a reference to the Gentiles, the nations of the earth that likewise long for, and are in need of salvation.

The mission of the Church effectively, is to bring others into this fold and to teach us to recognise the voice of the Shepherd amidst the din of the world. In this endeavour parents are the primary educators of their children in the Faith. At the most basic level this is the goal of catechesis and mystagogy, that is, instruction in the mysteries. This is done or should be done at every Sunday Mass, always. The homily or sermon is for both the preacher and the faithful an effort to learn to recognise the voice of the Good Shepherd who teaches us by means of His word, the word of truth. Our Lord guides us along *right* paths as we heard in our Responsorial Psalm because His Word is the truth that enlightens us our life. This Psalm, the Good Shepherd Psalm as it is known is a summary of the itinerary of our life in Christ.

One of the earliest documents of the Church, *The Apology in Defence of the Christians* by St. Justin, Martyr speaks of baptism as *illumination* because we experience *mental enlightenment* when we come to Christ, Way, Truth and Life. We must be clear about a very important element of our faith. The fundamental message of Christ our Lord is doctrine, yes, teaching; and adherence to His word is paramount. He comes as it were, as a package: the divine truth of his doctrine, as well as His compassion for others. If today's society rejects His doctrinal and moral message and just wants His warmth and compassion, this does not mean that we, who know better, should acquiesce to this desire. To do so, is a great disservice. Indeed, it is a betrayal of Christ Himself. *For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.... For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified...for those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God (1Cor. 1:18, 22-24)*. Jesus does not teach us to be nice. He enlightens us with His truth and teaches us to be good, *heroically good*. This is the essence of the Gospel. *You therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect (Mt. 5:48)*.

Some thirty years ago, I came across a passage in work of spirituality that I would like to share with you. I copied it and it has been in my prayer book all these many years. I have tried to be faithful to the truth of these words. *And yet those who have obeyed you proclaim that they have never wanted for anything since the day they agreed to have you as their sole riches. Lord, do not let my cowardice appear to give the lie to their robust witness. Above all, on the pretext of making it more palatable, do not allow us to water down the Gospel, nor tolerate that our soft talk lull the souls you have ransomed into a sense of false security. The day on which we start to believe that a stop-go faith and perfunctory devotion are quite enough, and that total self-giving and vocations to absolute devotion are the exception leading to intemperate and fanatical zeal – on that day we shall be worse than Sodom and Gomorrah, and we shall have blasphemed your Cross* (Pierre Charles, *Prayer for All Times*). Unbeknownst to me, at the time that I copied these words, the Blessed Virgin Mary, Our Lady of Kibeho was appearing to three young women in Rwanda in Africa. Why Rwanda? Our Lady said, *I came to Rwanda because here I still find humble hearts*. All of us have heard of the horrific Rwandan genocide of 1994 in which an estimated one million people were murdered. Few of us however, have heard of Our Lady of Kibeho, who more than ten years before the massacre, began appearing in Rwanda, calling humanity to repentance and warning the people of the coming atrocity. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NP622oshTK0>)

Three young women received these apparitions. Their names are Alphonsine, Nathalie and Marie Claire. In addition to the messages she delivered, Our Lady also taught the young visionaries hymns to sing. The messages stressed the need for redemptive suffering and unceasing prayer for a world caught up in evil and perched on the brink of the abyss. In one apparition, Our Lady said to Marie Claire, *People of our time have emptied each thing of its true meaning. He who commits a fault does not recognize that he did wrong*. What a succinct summary of what some call post-modernism. Yes, we are people who have emptied each thing of its true meaning. In two generations our culture has modified itself in radically unexpected ways, yet the truth of Christ remains forever. We have redefined and altered the meaning of human sexuality, the marriage act, marriage, life, death, the Sacraments, grace, sin, the priesthood, the Eucharist. As a result we have become blind, no longer able to recognize our sins. We do all that we can to silence those who speak the truth to us. To our shame and ruin, those who should have spoken the truth have been silent or have lulled us into *sense of false security with their soft talk*. How many of us have preferred this to the truth? Yes, we too are on the brink of the abyss because generally speaking, we are no longer aware of the transcendent purpose of our lives. Are we happier? Are we closer to God? Do we even care? Humanity boasts of its wickedness. How many souls are lost...

People of our time have emptied each thing of its true meaning. He who commits a fault does not recognize that he did wrong. This is how Marie Claire responded: *We are weak, without strength. Give us the strength to recognize our faults and to ask forgiveness for them*. There is only one way to recognize our faults. We must adhere with all our strength to the word of truth that Jesus speaks and we must speak that word with all boldness because our salvation and that of the world depends on it. *Lord and Saviour, above all, on the pretext of making it more palatable, do not allow us to water down the Gospel, nor tolerate that our soft talk lull the souls you have ransomed into a sense of false security*. At the beginning of this new millennium Pope St. John Paul II noted that *Revelation teaches that the Christian is not alone on the path of conversion. In Christ and through Christ, his life is linked by a mysterious bond to the lives of all other Christians in the supernatural union of*

the Mystical Body. This establishes among the faithful a marvellous exchange of spiritual gifts, in virtue of which the holiness of one benefits others in a way far exceeding the harm which the sin of one has inflicted upon others. There are people who leave in their wake a surfeit [an overabundance] of love, of suffering borne well, of purity and truth, which involves and sustains others. This is the reality of 'vicariousness', upon which the entire mystery of Christ is founded. His superabundant love saves us all. Yet it is part of the grandeur of Christ's love not to leave us in the condition of passive recipients, but to draw us into his saving work and, in particular, into his Passion. This is said in the famous passage of the Letter to the Colossians: 'In my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his Body, that is, the Church' (1:24). (Incarnationis Mysterium, 11). Our Lady spoke of the need for redemptive suffering. This is how we are drawn into Our Lord's saving work.

Marie Claire was killed in the Rwandan massacre. Mysteriously she was drawn into God's saving work, as we are, because we heed the voice of the Good Shepherd; and we heed no less the voice of His most Holy Mother. Let us be numbered among those *who leave in their wake a surfeit of love, [that is to say, an overabundance of love], of suffering borne well, of purity and truth, which involves and sustains others.* Let us be generous with our own sufferings and prayers; that they may be redemptive as Our Lady has asked. With the confidence of children let us also call upon Our Lady to help us again to find our way. One of the hymns that Our Lady taught the seers is entitled *We Are Calling Upon You, Mother:*

Queen of Heaven and Earth, / Mother of God and Mother of ours, / Listen to those who call upon you, / Help them to know God better...

You know how easily we get lost, / We need to know the true way, / The way that Jesus taught...

There are those who don't understand / Why Jesus wants us to follow Him, / Pray for them and pray for us, / That we may know His will and believe his words.

May Our Lady of Kibeho, Our Sorrowful Mother obtain for us the grace of perfect conformity to the word of God.