

4th Sunday of Easter

April 25, 2010

“My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. No one can take them out of my hand.”

—John 10: 27-28.

With the realization that God had come to live within them in Jesus, the first disciples committed themselves to bring others the same awareness. That commitment required the disciples to be mobile. They could not affix themselves and their ministry to any one place or community. They knew that they were being led forth by the power of the same Spirit who had strengthened and inspired Jesus. Therefore, it was with great courage and determination that disciples such as Paul and Barnabas set out together; the map of the then-known world was their itinerary, and its many peoples and cultures were their agenda.

They preached the good news to all they met, but not without encountering challenges and rejection. These negative experiences seemed only to strengthen the resolve of the first evangelists. Gradually, the complexion of the community of believers grew more multicultural and diverse. Gentiles were welcoming God’s word and its messengers. As a result, the church was becoming an all-inclusive entity, witnessing to the world – in many voices, in varying accents – the salvific power of God. Nevertheless, every success of the growing faith movement was tempered by harsh reality. There would always be people who would oppose them and try to quash what they deemed to be an aberration and an annoyance. When that happened, the disciples packed up, moved on, and began the process all over again, seeking new ears that would listen and new hearts that would accept their message.

In those times of difficulty, they probably listened more intently to hear the voice of Jesus. As their devoted shepherd, Jesus had promised: “My sheep hear my voice; I know them and they follow me ... no one can take them out of my Father’s hand”. It is a constant source of strength for believers to know and be known, to be held in another’s hand in all circumstances. The first disciples might often have been discouraged because they felt they were going it alone, but their Good Shepherd’s voice and loving hand assured them otherwise.

The visions of John also gave assurance to the growing Jesus movement. Like a drumbeat keeping a sure tempo in an otherwise cacophonous chorus, the visions of John spoke the same message over and over again: Don’t give up. In the good times, I am there, the source of your joy. In the times of sadness, struggle and suffering, I am even nearer. I am the Lamb who has died and now lives. I am your Shepherd who tends and feeds you. Listen to my voice, heed these words, take them to heart and find your solace and strength in them. Goodness will never be overcome by evil. Believe this and live accordingly.

Readings:

Acts 13: 14, 43-52

www.usccb.org/nab/bible/acts/acts13.htm#v14

Psalms 100: 1-2, 3, 5

www.usccb.org/nab/bible/psalms/psalm100.htm#v1

Revelation 7: 9, 14b-17

www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation7.htm#v9

John 10: 27-30

www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john10.htm#v27