

Easter 4
5/8/2024

FROM EVERY NATION, RACE, PEOPLE AND TONGUE.

In one way or another, each reading today speaks to us about life. This Fourth Sunday of Easter is known as Good Shepherd Sunday and we hear Jesus say, *My sheep hear my voice; I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life.*

That leads to three questions. *Do I listen to Jesus in my daily life?* Shepherds would call their sheep by name and the sheep would follow. Now someone can speak to us a great deal but that doesn't mean we listen to them.

Next question: *How do I listen to him?* Most likely it won't be a big booming voice that sounds like James Earl Jones on speakers at Arrowhead Stadium. Instead we listen to God in his word, in the sacraments, in the events of our daily lives and in prayer where we strive not only to talk to God but to listen to God; where we take time to listen to the voice of God in the echoes of our heart.

Third. *Do I do what he tells me?* Shepherds are called to protect their sheep but if the sheep don't respond, does it really matter? We're called to listen and to act.

Jesus calls us to eternal life. He calls us to follow him through his death and resurrection, through his Paschal Mystery, by baptism and by our lives after baptism, to follow him into eternal life or as our opening prayer asks, *that the humble flock may reach where the brave shepherd has gone before.* Simply put Jesus comes to bring us eternal life.

In the first reading Paul and Barnabas preach the gospel and are rejected. They tell their listeners that they *condemn themselves as unworthy of eternal life.* Then they expand their audience to others who come to believe. Rejected or accepted, they remain faithful to their message.

The second reading gives us a vision of heaven, literally. It's described as a great multitude, *from every nation, race, people and tongue.* It's a universal vision that leads to life-giving water, to eternal life. The word "catholic," with a small "c" means "universal."

That tells us that heaven will consist of those, from every nation, so there will be more people than just from your own country. From every race, so there will be more than just people from your own race. From every people, so not everyone will be like you. From every tongue, so not everyone will speak as you do. In our parish alone more than thirty nations are represented and as we come together to worship, we experience a hint of what is described to us today.

From every nation and race. There's no place for nationalism in heaven and no place for racism. Every time we pray the Our Father, we ask that it may be on earth as it is in heaven. If there's no place for nationalism or racism in heaven, there should be no place for them on earth as well.

Nationalism is distinct from patriotism. That distinction is important. Patriotism is a virtue, it's part of the virtue of piety because after our parents we owe something to society. Nationalism takes the virtue of patriotism and corrupts it into an idol, a very dangerous idol.

Racism denies the dignity of every human person made in the image and likeness of God. St. John Paul warned against a culture of death and that culture of death continues to be at work from abortion to war. Instead he spoke of a culture of life describing *Every human life is a unique and unrepeatable gift of God.* Not some human lives but every human life, young or old, sick or healthy, rich or poor, regardless of race or nationality, born or unborn.....born or unborn, every life is a unique and unrepeatable gift of God.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church, goes so far as to describe racism as a type of idolatry that can take the place of God in our lives. [2113] The bishops of our country have described racism as an injustice that fails to *acknowledge human dignity* and to recognize others *as the neighbors Christ calls us to love (Mt 22:39).* They also admit that this sin *has permeated the life of the Church and persists to a degree even today.* Nationalism and racism have no place in heaven. May it be so *on earth as it is in heaven.*

Jesus the Good Shepherd calls us, he calls us by name. May our hearts always listen to him. With our lives, nourished by the Eucharist, may we always respond generously to his invitation. He calls us, with lives of intentional faith, to follow him to eternal life, to the life of heaven where he and the Father reign with the Holy Spirit, a place that involves people *from every nation, race, people and tongue*. May Christ the Good Shepherd, give us the grace to follow him, *to reach where the brave shepherd has gone before*.