

The Shepherd's Hand

Homily for Tuesday of Easter 4:

Acts 11:19–26

Psalm 87:1b–7

John 10:22–30

John chapter 10 is part of a unit of the fourth Gospel that also includes chapters 8 and 9. In Chapter 8 Jesus declares “I am the Light of the World”. In chapter nine we have a detailed description of a man who was born blind to whom Jesus gives sight. Then, we have here in chapter 10 The Good Shepherd teaching

In the first verse of today’s Gospel, St. John says this all happened during the Feast of Dedication. The Jewish *Feast of the Dedication* is also called the *Festival of Lights* or *Hanakkuh*. This feast was held in late December, near the time when Christians celebrate the feast of Christmas. This is the time of year when the day is shortest and the night longest. So it is interesting that Jesus used this festival to not only declare he is the light of the world but to also heal a man born blind. As we get to chapter 10 Jesus talks about the sheep hearing the shepherd’s voice and how they will follow the true shepherd. This imagery is utilized with Jesus fully aware of those forces, the wolf and the hireling. The wolf wants to ravage the sheep fold and the hireling will provide superficial care. It is only the true shepherd who will guide and direct the sheep through this dark world.

Today’s reading indirectly poses a question for us? How secure is your faith and trust in God? In a world like this Jesus wants us to know that sheep without a shepherd are defenseless against prey, such as wolves, and often get lost and bewildered without a guide. That is why shepherds literally live with their sheep out in the open field and mountain sides. The shepherd guards his sheep from the dangers of storms, floods, and beasts of prey. The shepherd leads his sheep to the best places for feeding and the best streams for drinking. He finds the best place for their rest and safety at night. The sheep recognize the voice of their shepherd and heed his call when he leads them to safe pasture and rest.

Because we live in this dark world we can be very much like sheep who stray and we become easy prey to forces which can destroy us - sin, Satan, and a world in opposition to God and his people. The Lord Jesus came not only to free us from Satan's snares and the grip of sin, he came to personally lead us to the best of places where we can feed on his "word of life" and drink from the "living waters" of his Holy Spirit.

In this present life we will encounter trials, difficulties, and persecution. We can face them alone or we can follow Jesus, the true shepherd, who will bring us safely through every difficulty to the place of peace and security with God.

A governing theme in our readings today that speaks of this guidance is the image of the hand of God. In the reading from Acts we read:

“The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number became believers and turned to the Lord.”

In the Gospel we hear Jesus say:

No one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father’s hand.

Biblically the hand of God is illustrative of God’s shepherding presence.

God's hand makes it possible to convert great numbers of people. God's hand holds and protects us. Because there can be no snatching out of His hand ([Jn 10:28-29](#)), we have perfect security in His love. Even death cannot snatch us from God's hand, for the souls of the just who have died "are in the hand of God, and no torment shall touch them" ([Wis 3:1](#)).

If we sin, God's hand will weigh heavily on us night and day until we repent ([Ps 32:4](#)). His hand is so heavy because He loves us so much that He will try to prevent us from self-destruction through sin. In fact, our names are written on the palms of His hands ([Is 49:16](#)). Next to our names, His hands are also marked with the nails of His crucifixion and death for love of us.

People who know the shepherding hand of Jesus grow in embodying the very qualities used to describe the life of Barnabas:

he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.

Here there are two dimensions of his character that speak to how he cooperated with the hand of Jesus. He was a good man that is a man of moral integrity and uprightness. He was also full of faith that is he was a man who truly believed in the teaching of the Jesus and the Church. Because he so cooperated with the guiding hand of Jesus, he was full of the Holy Spirit.

May we pray for the grace to grow in in our character and faith as the hand of God is upon us here at St. Peters.