

23 April 2024 - Tuesday of the 4th week of Easter 'A

[Acts 11, 19-26; John 10, 22-30](#)

### Homily

Today's Gospel, like that of yesterday and Sunday, continues to speak of the Good Shepherd. This image obviously spoke volumes to the people of Galilee and Judea to whom Jesus was speaking.

The people of Israel had gone from being a small nomadic tribe to becoming a sedentary people. In this sedentary culture, the role of the shepherd protecting his flock from attacks by wild animals and guiding it in search of food and water was very important. So the Old Testament prophets often used this image of the 'shepherd' to describe God's care for his people. In the brief Gospel passage we have just read, the main sentence, the one that gives the key to understanding everything that has gone before, is the last one: The Father and I are ONE, says Jesus. He is the true shepherd.

Even if we no longer live in a culture where it is common to see a shepherd guiding his flock of sheep, it is not difficult for us to understand the message conveyed by the use of this image.

The Church is the community of all those who have put their faith in Christ - those who have heard his voice and want to follow him. The shepherd of the Church is Him, Jesus of Nazareth, always alive in our midst because we are gathered together in His name. We listen to His Word and follow Him. We are under His protection. This is true of the universal Church, as it is of each of the local communities, which, together, in their communion with one another, make up the universal Mystery of the Church. This is true of a diocese, a parish or a monastic community.

The Church is therefore all of us and all those throughout the world who have put their faith in Jesus of Nazareth. Within this Church there are, of course, people who have been given various responsibilities and ministries; there is, for example, the Pope, bishops and priests. The Church is not them; the Church is all of us -- including these leaders. Some, because of the ministry they have to carry out, are given the title of 'pastors'. But the only 'true shepherd' is the one who says, in today's Gospel: 'I am the true shepherd'. It seems to me that these words are likely to encourage us and prevent us from losing confidence.

The first reading, from the Acts of the Apostles, continues to describe the beginnings of the first Christian community. Here we

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see the exceptional role played by the apostle Barnabas. Barnabas was sent to Antioch by the Jerusalem community to see what was happening there, because it had been rumoured that the Gospel was also being preached there to the Greeks and was being received by them. By this time, Paul, who had recently been converted, had returned to his home in Tarsus, and everyone was keeping him away because they were suspicious of him. Barnabas had the brilliant idea of going to find Paul and starting to preach with him in the Greek world. The history of the Church would have been completely different had it not been for Barnabas' gesture and his great humility. Barnabas was the rising star in the early Christian community. He was quickly supplanted by Paul and humbly allowed himself to be supplanted.

This is how this immense, uncountable crowd of witnesses from the four corners of the world came into being - witnesses forever alive through their faith in Christ, despite the tears and suffering they endured.

May each of us strive this day to listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd, to allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by the joy of being known by Him, to follow in His footsteps, discovering the personal vocation that each of us has received to be His witness wherever He has called us.

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