

Fourth Sunday of Easter year A

John 10:1-10

A challenging passage – challenging to understand

...and perhaps to accept and live in our personal lives.

It helps, to an extent, to underscore that Jesus is speaking *to the Pharisees*
(and, of course, through them, to us (!), but, here, to the Pharisees).

The Pharisees

- have certain set ideas about God,
i.e. majestic, and in His majesty, somewhat *distant*
- are closed to Jesus

Jesus

- speaks of disturbing closeness to God
(like sheep who recognize their shepherd's voice...)
- reveals Himself to be God

There are two parts to this passage – which are complementary.

Read “logically”, one will be confused.

Why? Because we understand Jesus to be referring to different characters.

Jesus is not talking about different characters/persons.

Jesus reveals different aspects of the *same* character, i.e. Himself!

In this light, it is actually fairly simple (and full of hope!).

Jesus is making very bold claims.

We need to ask ourselves whether or not we truly believe them.

If they are true, our lives will be different.

We will be focused in a very particular way, a particularly loving and luminous way...

Let us try to grasp what is revealed (without, of course, ever being exhaustive):

There is a safe place to which the shepherd leads us.

Who is the shepherd, the Good Shepherd?

Jesus.

Where is the safe place?

As unusual as it may sound: the bosom of the Father, where *He* abides.

Indeed, St. Paul says that our citizenship is in heaven,

i.e. our true home is the bosom of the Father, of the mystery of God.

The depths of who we are have been placed in God. ...Think about it.

But, we are also still pilgrims.
We are like sheep being led, *and* who need to be fed.
The Shepherd leads us to verdant pastures for feeding.
The Shepherd feeds us.
What does He feed us?
He gives us divine food. He gives us *Himself*.
The most awesome food He gives: the Eucharist

And there is a gate thorough which we pass.
Who is the gatekeeper?
The one who offers His Son to us: the Father.
Who is the gate? *Jesus* (whose humanity links us to God in a new way)
Now, *whoever* leads through the gate is the shepherd.
By virtue of association with the Good Shepherd, there can be other shepherds...

But there is only *one gate*... a bold claim.
“Only one gate?!?!? Then what about all these other religions?
You can’t tell me that all these other people are going to hell!!”
That is not what Jesus is revealing.
Jesus said, “He who is not against us is for us” – even if not explicitly one of us.
But, either Jesus is the God-man or not.
If He is, then He is unique, and uniquely close.
Au contraire, because He is the God-man: all the while being *the gate*, being *the way*,
Jesus, in His great mercy and creativity, can be at work in other religions.
Does that make them equal to the Christian experience? NO!
They cannot offer the same intimacy of experience.
If our Christian experience is not intimate and relevant, then

- we are not experiencing it well
- we are not experiencing *Christ* as we are invited to experience Him.

Jesus tells us that we are like sheep.
Sheep know the shepherd’s voice.
Knowing a voice implies intimacy.
Knowing Jesus’ voice is not, of course, a question of hearing anything audibly.
It is a question of *knowing* that Jesus calls us by name.
We can know that – because we have the gift of faith
What is it to be called by name?
Name refers to person. *For example*:

- When we say “in the name of Jesus” we mean “in the *person* of Jesus”.
- When Jesus said “Mary!” to awaken Mary Magdalene
when He appears to her after the Resurrection and she does not recognize Him,
He reaches into her and takes hold of her heart and mind, of her *person*.

Jesus reaches into us and takes hold of our heart and mind.
This is something that we *know in faith*. It is not something that we necessarily feel.
And the faith whereby we know it
 does gradually give us a sense of His presence within us.

It is all about a personal relationship with the Good Shepherd who lays down His life us.
Otherwise, what are we doing here? Fulfilling some vague obligation?
If we are not here to encounter Someone,
 then it is understandable that we look forward to leaving.

The Good Shepherd knocks at the door of our hearts.
In His infinite strength, He is gentle and humble of heart
He wishes to lead and feed and pacify us.
Let us dare to say “yes” – as we are.
Let us let go.