**4th Sunday of Easter, Cycle. 2024.**

There was once **a man who owed several hundred sheep**. His servants used to take these sheep out for grazing but each evening, as they brought them back, they found two or three missing. He asked his servants to go and look for them; but for fear **of wild be**asts, they did not trouble themselves about them.

The owner loved his sheep and wanted to save them. He said, ***“If I go myself, searching for the sheep, they will not recognize me as they have not seen me before, so I must become like s sheep”.*** He went out found that some had gone astray and some had been wounded. They readily followed him, thinking he was a sheep like one of them. When he had saved all the sheep and brought them home, then he took off his sheep skin. He was not a sheep, but a man. He became a sheep in order to save the lost sheep. **God is not man. He became man in order to save them.**

Look at the Readings today: “***There is no other name by which we must be saved”,*** John says in the Second Reading today. Todays’ psalm says, ***“I will thank you for you are my Savio***r”. Look at the Gospel today, where Jesus say; “***I am the Good Shepher***d”. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the Sheep. **Savior, Salvation, redeemer, redemption**- are all abstract terms. Their meaning unlike that of the word **Shepher**d, is not easily recognized and grasped. **In Biblical and Christian vocabulary, the word Shepherd stands for compassion, concern, care and love.** Besides connoting these 5 noble sentiments, above all it stands for compassionate action. In the above story, **the sheep-owner did not spend his time shedding crocodile tea**rs over the sad plight of his sheep. His emotion of compassion moved him to action.

To describe Himself, His mission and action, Jesus seldom uses abstract terms: Instead He uses concrete, down-to-earth words. He calls Himself **not merely Shepherd, but the “Good Shepherd”. The term “Good Shepherd**” makes the rich contents of the words **salvation/redemp**tion concrete and tangible, full of existential meaning.

The word “**Shepherd”** further connotes relation: It is a relational word, calling for its counterpart, **She**ep. The goodness of the shepherd is manifested in his relationship because He, unlike the hirelings, loves His sheep and in moments of **danger, risks His life for the safety and protection of His sheep**. The hired hands, who have no concern for the sheep will run away at the sign of the trouble leaving the sheep to face the dangers on their own. **This imagery or the analogy of the Good Shepherd, works well for us even in less-agrarian lives.** We understand what it means to protect and love what and who are important to us. This generates trust. And it is this trust that makes the sheep listen to His voice and leads them to know Him. A deep and intimate relationship is thus established between the sheep and the good Shepherd. Jesus, the “**Good Sheph**erd”, is God’s love and compassion in action.

**It is an illusion for man to think that he can manage all by himself**. In doing so he ends up making a mess of his life or following blind leaders or giving himself to cases that bind him into a knotty bundle, leaving him empty and fettered.

How touching are Jesus’ words! ***“I am the Good Shepherd. I have the interests of My sheep foremost in My heart. I am ready to lay down My life for My sheep***”. How lucky we are to belong to the flock of Jesus!. We did nothing to merit it. Jesus is our Heavenly Father’s’ free gift to us. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who leads us to the Kingdom of His Father.

Jesus compared the Kingdom of God to a large, shady tree with huge, outspread branches where birds from all over flock to nest, rest and relax. This Kingdom is a place of serene security and peaceful rest. Jesus called Himself the Good Shepherd who leads His sheep into green pastures. There one can be free from anxieties and worries and lead a carefree life**. Beautiful, enchanting images!** But what needless cares we carry because we don’t care to be cared for by the caring, concerned friend- Jesus.

**The absolute and gentle power of the Lord corresponds to the whole depth of the human person, to the loftiest aspirations of intellect, will and heart**. Open wide the doors for Christ, to His saving power, open the boundaries of the states, economic and political systems, the vast fields of culture, civilization and development; **do not be afr**aid. Christ knows what is in man. He alone knows.