

# Homily

## Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> May 2022 – The Fourth Sunday of Easter

*Acts 9:36-43, Psalm 23, Revelation 7:9-17, John 19:22-30*

The image we have of Jesus as the shepherd of the Father's flock is one of the most beautiful images, we have of him and one we very often find adorning our churches in stain glass windows or works of art. And we owe this image to Jesus himself. This is how he described himself and his mission.

Jesus was no hired hand. The hired hand doesn't own the sheep and runs away as soon as he sees danger approaching. Jesus is the Good Shepherd. The sheep belong to him, and he is ready to die for them.

Jesus made the most wonderful promises to those who belong to him. He said that none of them would ever be lost. No one would succeed in snatching from his care the sheep the Father has entrusted to him. The sheep that belong to him will be safe with him because the Father's power is with him. And he will lead them to the pastures of eternal life.

The feeling of belonging to Jesus, and of being known and loved by him, is enormously comforting and reassuring. Who would not want to belong to his flock? But how can we tell if we truly belong to his flock? What does belonging entail? Essentially three things.

The first and basic requirement is to believe in him. We enter the flock by becoming believers. But belief is only the beginning. The second requirement is to listen to his voice: "My sheep listen to my voice." To listen to his voice is to heed his teachings. And the third requirement is to follow him: "My sheep follow me." To follow him is to do his work. There we have it in a nutshell. It's really very simple.

Obviously, the relationship is a two-way thing. The sheep have to choose to belong. Jesus won't or can't save people against their will. But it is wonderfully consoling to realise that if we do sincerely want and try to belong to him, following and doing what he says, then he will take care of us in life and death. He promises to give us eternal life. We can pin our hopes on his word: "I give them eternal life..... they will never be lost."

It doesn't mean that belonging to Jesus will guarantee us an easy life here on earth. The opposite is more likely to be the case. Those who belong to him are likely to be persecuted, but those who remain faithful through their trials, will

share in his glory in heaven, as we hear in the second reading. Trials and suffering are an opportunity to prove one's faith and obedience to the Lord.

The flock is the image of community. Even on a human level we have a deep need for community. Jesus knew this. That's why he wanted his followers to live as a community. In community we find mutual support, encouragement, and companionship. We can't belong to Jesus without belonging to his flock. The privilege of belonging is not something that is offered to a chosen few, but to everyone.