Monday of the Fourth Week of Easter

Gospel text (*Jn* 10:1-10): Jesus said: “Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever does not enter a sheepfold through the gate but climbs over elsewhere is a thief and a robber. But whoever enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens it for him, and the sheep hear his voice, as he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has driven out all his own, he walks ahead of them, and the sheep follow him, because they recognize his voice. But they will not follow a stranger; they will run away from him, because they do not recognize the voice of strangers.” Although Jesus used this figure of speech, they did not realize what he was trying to tell them.

So Jesus said again, “Amen, amen, I say to you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came [before me] are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. A thief comes only to steal and slaughter and destroy; I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly.”

“But whoever enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep (…) the sheep follow him, because they recognize his voice”

Fr. Francesc PERARNAU i Cañellas
(Girona, Spain)

Today, we keep mulling over one of the most beautiful and well known images of Jesus' preaching: the Good Shepherd, his sheep and the gate. We all keep in our memory the figure of that good Shepherd we were able to look at, as children. An icon well beloved by the first fold, that already belongs to the Christian sacred art at the time of the catacombs. How many memories can be aroused in us that young shepherd with the wounded sheep on his shoulders! We have, quite often, seen ourselves projected in the figure of that poor animal.

Only a few days ago, we were still celebrating Easter and, once more, we have been reminded that Jesus did not speak in a figurative language when He was saying that the good shepherd offers his life for his sheep. For He really did it: his life was the price He paid for our retrieval; with his life He bought ours, and thanks to that deliverance we have been rescued: “I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved” (Jn 10:9). We find here the great mystery of the ineffable love of God that reaches unthinkable

extremes to save each human creature. Jesus brings his love to the extreme, to the point, of offering his own life. We can still hear the echo of St. John's words in his Gospel, introducing us to the moments of His Passion: “Before the feast of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father. He loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end” (Jn 13:1).

Of the words of Jesus, I would suggest our paying a deeper attention to these ones: “I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me” (Jn 10:14); even more so, “The sheep hear his voice (...) the sheep follow him, because they recognize his voice” (Jn 10:3-4). It is true Jesus knows us, but, can we also say we know Him well enough, that we love Him and we reciprocate as we should?

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- “And who is He who leads the sheep out, but the Same who loosens the chain of their sins, that they may follow Him with free unfettered step? And when he puts forth his own sheep, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him” (Saint Augustine)

- “Surprisingly, the shepherd discourse does not begin with the words: “I am the Good Shepherd”, but with the “door” image. Jesus is establishing the criterion for those who will shepherd his flock. The proof of a true shepherd is that he enters through Jesus as the door. For in this way it is ultimately Jesus who is the Shepherd—the flock “belongs” to him alone” (Benedict XVI)

- “God calls each one by name. Everyone's name is sacred. The name is the icon of the person. It demands respect as a sign of the dignity of the one who bears it” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, Nº 2158)