

Homily – May 11th, 2025 – 4th Sunday of Easter

If you were ever having a bad day, a bad week, a bad month, or even a bad year, read this gospel passage that we just heard, and meditate on it. It's not long, but it offers one of the most comforting messages in the entire Bible. Jesus says that we,



the sheep, will never perish. Nor will we, the sheep, ever be snatched out of his hand. And if that isn't comforting enough, the very next line goes even further. Jesus says that what the Father has given him, meaning you and me, can never be

snatched out of the Father's hand. Our little lives are in Jesus' hand and Jesus' hand is in God's hand. Jesus ends with saying, ***"The Father and I are one."*** In other words, "What's in my hand is in the hand of God, and nothing or no one gets wrestled out of God's hand." It's not just sweet words, it's not just the power of positive thinking, and it's not meant to minimize our pain or suffering. It's meant to be an invitation to live, whatever we are living right now, from a place of security and confidence rather than from a place of false security and fear.

Two of the worst homilies I've ever heard in my nearly 60 years on this earth, I heard in the last 10 days. In the first homily, the homilist made it a point to say that there is no salvation outside of the Roman Catholic Church. At Vatican II, which wrapped up in 1965, the Church moved passed that narrow, judgmental, condescending attitude of superiority. Somebody has had their head in the sand

for the past 60 years. In the second homily, the homilist said that if we don't pray, we might as well kiss salvation good-bye. Another sad commentary. After listening to a homilist like that, who would want to turn to God in prayer?

The wonderful gospel passage last Sunday was about the resurrected Jesus telling Peter to throw out his net one more time. Peter did so and hauled in a net full of fish. There were so many fish, yet we are told ***"the net was not torn."*** The net is the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom that we promise to co-build with God's Spirit each time we say in the Our Father, "May your Kingdom come, your will be done." The fact that the net held 153 fish, all the known species of fish in the world, means that in God's kingdom there's room for everyone! After all, the Apostles were called away from fishing fish and were given the new task of fishing people. There's no indication that Jesus ever told the Apostles to throw any of the fish back into the sea.

Jesus' only interest is to hold everyone in the world in his hands, hands that will never allow anyone or anything to snatch us away. Jesus has no vested interest in dropping people like hot potatoes because they are not part of the Roman Catholic Church or because they don't know how to pray. Messages like that are not the gospel. Messages like that are not the Good News.

Jesus says in today's gospel, ***"I know them*** (referring to us his sheep) ***and they follow me."*** Even if we don't know Jesus very well, that's OK. It doesn't jeopardize our relationship. Our salvation is in the fact that he knows us. Jesus doesn't just know something about us—he knows us. Maybe the task in the spiritual life is to

allow ourselves to be fully known. If we can't be totally authentic in front of others, usually for fear that others would reject us if they really knew about our sketchy past, perhaps the starting point is letting down our guard in prayer and allowing God to know us through and through. Like a shepherd who knows his sheep, even by name, that's how God knows us.

"I know them," says Jesus. I know them in the joy of their marriage and in the pain of when they go to bed not talking to each other. I know them in the exuberance of their youth and in the days where the joy has run out of their lives. I know them in their moments of grace and in their moments of disgrace. I know them on the days when they are excited about sharing their gifts and on the days when they are sure they have nothing to offer. I know them in the morning sunshine and in the clouds of evening. I know them in their proudest achievements and in their shameful feelings.

Sometimes the Good News is so good we can't believe it. We convince ourselves that there must be a catch, after all, in the world we live in you don't get anything for nothing. If it seems too good to be true, it's probably not true.

Paul, a faithful Jew, always brought the Good News of Jesus Christ to his Jewish brothers and sisters first. He always tried to invite himself to a synagogue to give them the first chance to hear about this Jesus. Most of the times, the Good News was too good to be believed, and he would be run out of the synagogue or even run out of town all together. When that happened, that first reading tells us that he didn't call down fire from heaven to burn these people up. Instead, he shook

the dust off his feet in protest against them and went on to Iconium, another town. The Jews then, like a lot of Christians now, wanted to earn their salvation. Paul, on the other hand, wanted to give it to them as a gift from God. Even though they were rejected, Paul and his disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

Rejection couldn't kill their joy. They knew there was no catch, no strings attached, to God's grace. Why we can't accept anything for free is still a mystery to me. After his conversion to Christ, Paul felt guilty for persecuting the Church. He wanted to do something, something big for God to make up for his guilt. Perhaps he even wanted Jesus to punish him for his past sins. Instead, what he got was the voice of Jesus who said to him, "Paul, my grace is enough for you."

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, says to each of us, "My grace is more than enough for you. I hold you in the palm of my hand and nothing can ever snatch you away."

Fr. Phil