

Homily Fourth Sunday of Easter May 7, 2017

One of the principles I was raised on was to do things for oneself rather than pay someone else to do it. I could write a book about the things our Dad had us do, rather than hire it out. In recent years I have been engaged in a lot of improvement projects on my future retirement home. I am learning how to read the pictures in those IKEA instructions. One of my first projects was a little vanity cabinet for my bathroom. It became a lesson in the importance of reading the instructions carefully and actually follow them. I thought the finished project should be different from what was pictured. I did manage to force the issue and put it together the way that I wanted to, and it works, but not as well as if I had followed the designer and manufacturer's instructions.

Even more important than the objectivity of assembly instructions from a manufacturer is the objectivity of divine revelation, from our creator. In the Gospel today Jesus affirmed an important objective revealed truth that is addressed elsewhere in the Gospels. Jesus affirmed the truth that He is the only way through which one can be united to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Today the Gospel presents this truth in the context of the broader message about Jesus as the Good Shepherd. Each year the fourth Sunday of Easter is billed as Good Shepherd Sunday. The Gospels for the next two years come from later verses of the same chapter as today's Gospel. They will speak directly to Jesus' self-identification as the Good Shepherd. But before speaking of Himself as the shepherd, He identified Himself as the gate, as He does in this passage, the only way that the sheep could enter into the sheepfold. And that sheepfold is the Kingdom of God, the Church on earth and heaven in eternity.

The catechism teaches us that God, our God, the one and only God, wills that all people be saved from the separation from Him which is the consequence of sin. It teaches that all have sinned. It teaches that the redemptive death of Jesus was the act that opened the sheep gate for all who are to be saved. If a Catholic is saved, it is only through Jesus Christ. If a protestant is saved, it is only through Jesus Christ. If a Jew, or a Muslim, or a Buddhist or an atheist is saved, it is only through Jesus Christ. It is God's problem to judge the culpability of anyone for not explicitly believing in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. It is then our job to reduce the number of such people.

For those who do believe the message of today's Gospel, for those who do believe that Jesus is the gateway to the kingdom, to heaven, there are two levels of response. First, that person, we, should capitalize on our relationship with

Jesus Christ. The statement about His place as the gateway to God is the lead in to His declaration that He is the Good Shepherd. So those who believe in Jesus as the sole gateway to God should let Him be their shepherd.

Jesus shepherds directly and through His Church, that is through the ministry of the ordained and through the apostolates of all the Christian faithful. So the first order of business of we who believe in Jesus as the sheep-gate is to know Him well. It is the knowledge that comes through a guided reading of the Sacred Scriptures, especially the Gospels that describe His words and deeds. It is the knowledge that comes through the mystical union with Jesus Christ in prayer, when in faith and humility we make our selves available so that He may speak to our mind and heart. It is the knowledge which is mediated through His Church who continues to guide us in our understanding of Jesus and the Sacred Scriptures through the work of the Holy Spirit. It is also the experience of grace, an infusion of the God life through the sacraments, made possible by the death and resurrection of Jesus.

This direct experience of Jesus is necessary in order for each one of us to take on our role in shepherding brothers and sisters in our midst. It is the shepherding of bishops and priests. But it is the shepherding of parents, of all who minister in the Church and in each one of us who accepts our responsibility to help draw others to Jesus Christ.

Sometimes I get the impression that people confuse a certain respect for alternate religious viewpoints with an indifference about whether it makes a difference what people believe to be true, or that all viewpoints are equally valuable. The willingness to share our knowledge of and faith in Jesus Christ is a sign of generosity. We should want to help people embrace the way that more directly puts them in touch with Jesus so that whatever goodness they already express may be enriched and elevated. It is that life to fullest Jesus came to bring. Elsewhere Jesus reminded us that He is the way, the truth and the life. He is the manual for the building of a fruitful life in union with God. And He provides the tools to build that life.

We are to be disciples - people who follow Jesus as the essential gateway to God and the kingdom. And we are to be missionaries, people willing to show others that Jesus who is their essential gateway to God. Perhaps some of our hesitancy is the awareness of our own imperfection as disciples of Jesus Christ. But that can in itself be an important part of our missionary testimony. That is, if our falling short constantly calls us to Jesus to ask for mercy. And the humble embrace of His mercy provides the strength to try harder to be a good

disciple. And in trying harder we will inevitably touch people with mercy and charity that gives credibility to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and makes them want to read and follow the instructions for themselves.