

*My sheep listen to my voice; I know them and they follow me.*

Living in this North American culture, sometimes a Christian experiences his life like that of a sheep lost in the market. We hear the shouts of shepherds with no face, calling from behind the walls and windows of their business. Strong voices sound from the other side of barred doors, and they promise us the road to happiness, a road that begins with buying something they sell. They promise us much, but in time we discover that, for the voices with no face, we are useful only for the happiness of others.

So many voices reach our ears, sounding together like a dissonant cacophony. But in an instant of grace, this experience leads us to a truer understanding of who we are: we are the sheep of the Lord Jesus, with hunger in our ears to listen to *his* voice. We are the ones who seek among the many voices, the Word of the Lord Jesus. Without being able to distinguish the voice of Jesus, we would remain like lost and disappointed sheep, without a trusted counselor for the long journey of life.

Jesus is the Shepherd sent to rescue the sheep. The Good Shepherd looks for his sheep, crying out in the streets so that the scattered sheep can take sure steps in the pilgrimage of life.

He gave us the gift of the Holy Spirit, and this means that we share with Him a relationship that is alive and real. This is why we can discern his voice in the midst of a world with so many voices, so many shouts. There is only one Holy Spirit, giving to those who seek Him the capacity to know the wishes, the aspirations even the beating of the heart of the Good Shepherd.

And if the shepherds calling to us from their windows of business ask us why we place our trust in the voice of the Good Shepherd, we will say without shame that we listen to the Good Shepherd because the Lord Jesus first listened to us. The Lord Jesus during his life on this earth dedicated himself to hearing the laments, and drying the tears of the injured and lost sheep. He heard the shouts of the lepers on the road, raised from the dead the only son of the aged widow; He gave light to blind eyes, and strength to the crippled. He announced a kingdom of grace, giving a strong welcome to the poor, the sinners, the rejected and the cast-away of the

community.

Who would dare say that Jesus came into the world to seek his own interests? The Lord Jesus is our Good Shepherd because he dedicated himself to the needs of his sheep. His word and his work identify him as the true messenger of God the Father. Being God, He Himself is the Lord's answer to our sorrows and needs. The Lord listens to the voice of his sheep, and feels the beating of our suffering hearts. Nothing of ours is foreign to Him.

On this Sunday, I wish to direct the attention of our ears to the voice of those who have certainly been heard by the Lord Jesus. You know that many sheep in our Hispanic community are suffering. As Catholics and as human beings we see the unbearable conditions affecting workers who are present in our communities without government documents. We are profoundly conscious that these conditions cause great harm to many families. The Lord listens to the voice of his sheep, and we the church, try to listen to and put into practice what the voice of the Good Shepherd teaches us.

The church has received from the Good Shepherd, and she herself teaches, that justice begins with an actual respect for persons. Justice takes root in the acknowledgement of the dignity of the human being. Human dignity is not a government concession, but a real recognition of what it means to be *a human being*. By means of the act of creation, God has written into the human being a personal greatness that deserves the respect of all. At the same time, this respect should be written into the laws of a country. Justice in the social order sustains itself in a society only in relation to this human dignity, finding in it the point of departure for social development, and the criteria for the evaluation of the quality of that same development.

The Catholic Church in the United States judges that the laws of immigration in this country are configured in such a way as to cause unbearable harm to persons working in the United States without permission from the government. Moreover, they cause a profound injury to the families of the same workers.

The first response from a Christian to such conditions is to practice justice, and devote himself to charity. The second response, given together with the first, is to work towards a change in the social

order.

Many people, because of a lack of legal recognition, cannot confidently go out to participate and contribute in our local communities. They feel isolated, are scared, and live like shadows on the wall. These present conditions represent a privation of that dignity of persons that God Himself established in His beloved children, and a privation of life and grace in our communities. The voice of the Good Shepherd urges us to find a way to alleviate the most terrible suffering for the human person in this world: that of feeling closed in, isolated, and without true companionship. I ask you in the name of the Good Shepherd, who went out in search of his sheep, to dedicate yourselves to treating with humanity those who are most isolated in our communities.

*The law of charity is the supreme law*, and charity is shown between persons that are alert to care for other persons. The church, in any country, must maintain itself as an open community, inviting the ones who live as shadows to share a real communion of life with other people, and with the Lord Himself.

As sheep instructed by the voice of the Gospel, we recognize the voice of the Lord when we dedicate ourselves to alleviating the suffering of any human being. This is a calling to the conscience of all. The example of the Good Samaritan is for us a manifestation of the voice of the Good Shepherd, showing us that there is no reaching the end of our road towards the Lord without being ready to serve the rest of those walking this pilgrimage with us. Paradoxically, a Christian does not arrive at the end of life's journey if he or she cannot stop on the way in order personally to find the brother or sister in grave danger. A Christian cannot turn away his face in order to avoid the gaze of a suffering brother or sister.

The moment also lends itself to express in a more concrete manner, the importance of the struggle for a change in the social order. Recognizing that God inspires us to work for justice, the church offers her teaching as a light for the way to a more just society.

Today, on this day Sunday, April 29<sup>th</sup> Cardinal Maida, Archbishop of Detroit, published a declaration about the urgent need for a reform of the immigration laws in the United States. He

published it on behalf of all the bishops of Michigan, and in the name of the Catholic Church in Michigan.

I want to read to you the complete text so that you will directly know the content of this declaration by the Cardinal:

*We, the Roman Catholic Bishops of the state of Michigan, wish to add our voices to the ongoing public debate regarding the rights and responsibilities of immigrants, particularly those of Hispanic descent. As shepherds who understand the needs of our people, we speak in communion with all the Bishops of our nation. We also build on the long-standing social justice tradition of our Church, a tradition which teaches the dignity of every person and our responsibility to work against any injustices which would compromise the dignity of immigrants, especially workers and their families.*

*For the sake of justice toward immigrant laborers, we propose that the laws of our nation should conform to the following principles:*

- 1. **Immigration legislation should permit the prompt reunification of families.** Our current immigration system imposes an unbearable burden upon the families of many immigrants. Spouses and minor children of permanent residents working in the United States often wait eight years in order to receive a visa necessary for the reunification of the family. The law itself places workers in the position of having to make an impossible choice: they must choose between immigrating to the United States without documentation and, therefore, without the protection of their rights or working within the legal system but at the expense of an indefinite separation from their families.*
- 2. **Immigration legislation should open a path toward the legalization of undocumented workers currently living and working in the United States.** The economy of the United States enjoys the benefits of immigrant workers but without providing recognition of their dignity as workers. Legalization should not impose intolerable burdens on*

*workers – such as severe monetary sanctions and family separations.*

- 3. Immigration legislation should create an efficient system for the future entrance of temporary workers as well as permanent legal residents. Justice requires that immigrant workers have the same benefits, salaries, and labor protections enjoyed by other American workers. Immigration reform should facilitate the unity of families and allow workers the possibility of secure movement from the United States to the land of their birth. While the Church recognizes the importance of secure borders, such concerns can be addressed without jeopardizing good and respectful working relationships among employers and employees, whether they are from the United States or from another country.*

*We invite everyone – Catholics and non-Catholics alike – to take an active part in the promotion of a just and realistic reform of the immigration system in the United States. We ought to make known to our representatives in Congress the urgency of this problem with hopes that they will, this year, arrive at a real solution.*

*On May 1, we celebrate the feast of Saint Joseph the Worker. We look to Saint Joseph as the husband of Mary, the Virgin Mother of God, the guardian of the child Jesus and a humble laborer, a carpenter. As St. Matthew's Gospel reminds us, the Holy Family knew firsthand the experience of migrant peoples; they also modeled the dignity of human labor and the sanctity of family living. As we celebrate this feast and many gather around the world to affirm the dignity and rights of workers, in a special way, we join our voices with those of the Hispanic immigrant workers. We thank God for their presence and gifts, and pledge to work together with all people of goodwill for the recognition of their civic rights.*

*On May 1<sup>st</sup>, the local community has an opportunity to manifest its desire to live in a more just society. The Archdiocese of Detroit suggests to the faithful that they go to work or to school on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May. We invite them to participate in the worker's march in the city of Detroit, to the extent that the obligations of family, work and*

school might permit. Our will to contribute to the common good of our society is clearly shown by our daily dedication to the family, work and education. Nonetheless, the Church recognizes the right of people to take occasions publicly and peacefully to manifest their desires to promote justice and peace.

**May the Most Holy Virgin of Guadalupe, lamp for those in need, show us how to listen to the voice of the Lord Jesus, Good Shepherd of our souls. May the Lord Jesus, trustworthy Companion in our pilgrimage in life, inspire us with a deep love towards our neighbors, and guide us to green pastures of justice, so that all might enjoy a life more divine, and at the same time, more just and more human. Amen.**