

Fourth Sunday of Easter, C – May 9, 2022 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Cathedral of Saint Paul, Birmingham, Alabama – 7:15 & 11:00am Sunday Masses – 550 words

We gather for Good Shepherd Sunday, and this year’s gospel is a very brief passage that is, nonetheless, rich in content. In few words, St. John tells us the basic truths that we need to know about our Good Shepherd, the Lord Jesus: that he speaks to us, that he leads us, that he protects us, that he wants what is good for us. And more than that, that he is one with the Father, who is “greater than all” – in other words, no challenge we ever face in following our Shepherd is insurmountable.

The second reading, part of John’s great vision of heaven in Revelation, also reinforces these truths from the gospel; in speaking about “the ones who have survived the time of great distress”, it reminds us how those who are in heaven persevered in following the Shepherd during their time on earth, and how he finally brought them to that place of safety. This perseverance in following Christ is essential in any age; every age has its challenges, different though they may be.

Yes, Christians in every age have had to face challenges through which it was necessary to persevere, in spite of the difficulty they presented them or the losses they had to suffer. What are the challenges we face? I think one of the greatest is the gaslighting that is increasingly prevalent in our modern messaging. More and more, we are made to question things that we always took for granted, things we always understood as true. Sometimes, we are even made to feel crazy for thinking them.

The first reading narrated a similar tale: Paul and Barnabas preached the word of God to the crowds; some rejected it, contradicted it, even violently so – others accepted it and suffered persecution as a result. And it says that those who did accept it and follow it – that is, those who began following the Good Shepherd – were those “who were destined for eternal life”. More than that, they were “filled with joy and the Holy Spirit”. That same joy is available to us, if we persevere in following Christ.

A brief verse from the Letter to the Hebrews often comes to my mind, as I, in my own way, strive to navigate through this life: namely, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and for ever”. We must hold fast to what he teaches through what he has revealed and through his Church, even when some try to make us feel crazy for it; even when it is violently contradicted. He will give us the grace to do so; and hopefully that grace meets with our good resolve, so that it can take root and bear fruit.

We have to keep our sights set on the goal – on that “great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people, and tongue” that is in heaven. We want to join their number. The fact that it is such a diverse group means that Christ is able to save everyone. He is able to save you and me. And he wants to! He is one with the Father, who is “greater than all”. He is our Good Shepherd, who never abandons us, but is always ready to sustain us, so that we may persevere to the end.