

4th Sunday of Easter - C
Acts 13:14, 43-52;
Revelation 7:9, 14b-17;
John 10:27-30
Little Flower - 4/17/16

My Brothers and Sisters,

At the end of Mark's Gospel, Jesus said to his apostles, "*Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature*" [16:15].

After Pentecost, the apostles, including Paul, initially proclaimed the gospel only to Jews, which included converts to Judaism. Today's first reading represents a transition point in the early history of the Church. Today's reading from Acts tells how Paul became the Apostle to the Gentiles. When the Jews rejected the teaching of Paul and Barnabas, they told them, "*It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first, but since you reject it..., we now turn to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us, 'I have made you a light to the Gentiles, that you may be an instrument of salvation to the ends of the earth.'*"

Controversy over the admittance of Gentiles to the community led to the Council of Jerusalem, often considered the first ecumenical council. At that first Council, the Christian community chose inclusion over exclusion. Multiple times throughout the history of the Church, the Church chose to be inclusive. Those decisions are validated by John's vision of God's kingdom in the second reading: "*I, John, had a vision of a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people, and tongue.*"

For most of our history, going into the whole world and proclaiming the gospel to every creature has been understood geographically, i.e., going to the ends of the earth, to use the words of Paul and Barnabas. I would suggest we are now living in another transition time.

Both Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict frequently referred to the new evangelization and re-evangelization. Both popes reminded us of our personal need to be re-evangelized and the need to re-evangelize our culture and society. Early in his pontificate, Pope Francis spoke often about going out to the margins to invite and welcome all the marginalized into the family of God. In last week's apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, he called us to proclaim the Gospel of God's mercy to all families, especially those who are alienated from the Church, those who have felt marginalized by the Church.

The Fourth Sunday of Easter is sometimes called Good Shepherd Sunday because the Gospel is always about the Good Shepherd. This very short Gospel helps us to understand what it means for Jesus to be the Good Shepherd. First, Jesus knows his sheep. When Jesus says that he knows his sheep, he means that he knows them intimately. Jesus knows each of us as individuals. He knows each of us personally. He knows each of us by name.

Second, Jesus leads us to eternal life. A few verses earlier, Jesus said, "*I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly.*" The clue to what this life is is found in the last verse of today's Gospel: "*The Father and I are one.*" Life more abundantly is communion with the Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

My brothers and sisters, today is the World Day of Prayer for Vocations. Priests carry on the ministry of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, by proclaiming the Gospel, celebrating the sacraments, and serving the community. Religious have a unique vocation in the Church. If the church is called to witness to the world all that the world is called to be, religious communities are called to witness to the Church all that the Church is called to be. Today the Church invites us to pray specifically for vocations to priesthood and religious life.