

Fourth Sunday of Easter 2019

My beloved brothers and sisters in the last twenty years of my mother's, she suffered greatly. I found a stained glass plaque that said: "Joy is not the absence of suffering but the presence of God!" Many years later, up until she died, she kept that plaque in her kitchen window in front of the sink where she washed her dishes. It was a constant reminder to her of God's presence with her! The first reading for today expresses the profound joy of the apostles, even amidst the great persecutions and struggles that they experienced, and even the real possibility of gruesome deaths! They were filled with the Holy Spirit, and knew, for a certainty, that Jesus had not gone away from them, but now lived deeply in their hearts, closer to them than we are to ourselves! Joy is the hallmark of Christianity. It is the gift of Easter. It is a sign of the Divine Presence of Jesus, even amidst the darkness of these times. It is the bright, shining light that not only shines into our lives, but out of our lives upon others. It is also what is missing from so many lives today, because so many have not allowed the Good Shepherd to touch their lives, and lead them into His hand!

Jesus, the Divine Shepherd says to us today: "I know my sheep, and they follow me...I give them eternal life and they shall never perish...No one can take them out of my hand, for My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one can take them out of the Father's hand, and the Father and I are one!"

My beloved brothers and sisters, joy is the certainty of being so loved that I know that even though I am a sinner, even in the midst of suffering, nothing, no power in this universe can ever take me out of the hand of the Good Shepherd. I belong to Him, and He will never lose me! It is the certainty that even though I have sometimes departed from Him; nonetheless, He has never departed from me, and I can always go running back into His hands, and He will receive me in great joy. Indeed Jesus tells us that the greatest consolation we can give Him, is to let Him love us with the infinite love and mercy He is ready to flood our lives with! Jesus never promised us success or a life without struggle; rather, He promised that no one can ever take us out of His Hands, because we belong to Him- He is God and He is one with the Father, and in Him, we are safe and in Him we are infinitely

loved and precious to Him and the Father! Nothing can snatch us out of His hands, even though we are always free to jump out of His hands, but, He is always ready to catch us. Do you want to live a life full of hope, full of love, full of joy? Of course you do, and Jesus wants this for you and me as well, even more than we want it! Ask Jesus: Lord, I want it all! I want the full measure of your love to come and possess me! I want to live always in your hands in and your heart! I want to belong to you always! And then, remind yourself: "I am His beloved one, I belong to Him, and He belongs to me!"