

April 17, 2016 – Fourth Sunday of Easter
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Acts 13:14, 43-52; Psalm 100: 1-3, 5; Revelation 7:9, 14-17; John 10:27-30

We are well into the Easter season: The Risen Christ among us. The readings today of the fourth Sunday of Easter teach us much about the life of a follower of Christ, the true Lamb and Shepherd.

If you have ever seen sheep, especially here in Africa, you know they need to be guided by a shepherd or they would just wander and drift into the road and be killed. They wouldn't even know what hit them. They need protection and guidance as we all do. The sheep need to know the voice of the shepherd to adhere to the shepherd's protection and guidance.

In Acts, Paul and his companions arrived in Antioch in Pisidia and on the following Sabbath nearly the whole town came to hear the word of God. People were hungry to be taught and to hear the word of God.

Also in the book of Revelation we read of the enormous crowd, people of every race, tribe, nation, standing in front of the throne of the Lamb, dressed in white robes, praising God. When asked who are these people dressed in white robes, the answer came: these are the people who came safely through the persecution and are praising God at his throne. "They will hunger no more, and thirst no more...for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs the water of life." (Revelation 7:16-17)

These readings bring me back to the New Year celebrations in our parish in Mabatini located in Mwanza, Tanzania. The people truly shout to the Lord with cries of gladness, as described in Psalm 100, as they have survived another year and are thrilled to enter into the New Year. Poor people, who struggle for even the basics, truly are grateful to God and depend on his guidance and protection.

Margaret, a trained physical therapy assistant who works in the parish public health office, is a typical Tanzanian who sacrifices to educate her children. One day Margaret came to work with a swollen jaw and a toothache. I asked her if she had received medical treatment. She said no and I inquired why not, because as an employee she is a member of the National Social Security Fund (NSSF) and can be covered with medical insurance through NSSF. She was embarrassed and said she had not gotten the necessary paperwork to have medical insurance. She stated that because she had paid her son's school fees and tuition, she had no means to pay for the documents necessary for medical coverage. Needless to say I assisted so she could get her medical benefits, but it shows the decisions and sacrifices that people who are economically poor have to make.

The people in Tanzania hunger to learn – they sacrifice in order to obtain an education, and parents like Margaret will pay most of their income in school fees for their children. They even pay large tutoring fees to the teachers for after-school hours; this is mainly so the teachers can receive sufficient money to survive as they cannot live on the government's salary. Yet even with this sacrifice, few receive a good education, and even fewer receive jobs after school.

The message is to praise God and hear his word and his voice, know him and follow him. We are all challenged to listen to the voice of God, so as to be guided and protected, but we should also hear the voice of God in poor people, and share our resources so all can receive the basics of life, such as a good education. This is the responsibility of all individuals, all leaders of institutions, governments, etc.: to provide a sufficiency and equality that reduces poverty and provides justice for all.