FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER (Year A)
May 3, 2020

I. Introduction

One of the greatest movies ever made was Cecile B. DeMille’s 1956 epic *The Ten Commandments*, with the actor Yul Brynner portraying the Egyptian Pharaoh, and the native Michigander Charlton Heston as Moses. Heston’s deep and melodious voice was perfect for the important line spoken by Moses to Pharaoh, “Thus says the Lord God of Israel: Let My people go.” The real person of Moses, of course, was one of the most important and inspiring leaders in history, for God chose him to shepherd His people Israel, freeing them from slavery in Egypt and leading them to their promised homeland.

There’s an old Jewish legend explaining why God chose Moses for this role. Moses was shepherding some sheep belonging to his father-in-law Jethro, and one day he spotted a little lamb that suddenly left the flock and ran off into the underbrush. Moses dropped everything and went after the lamb, so that it would not become lost or killed by a predator. When he finally caught up with the lamb, he found it beside a tiny stream of water, drinking feverishly. Moses waited patiently until the lamb was finished drinking, then scooped it up in his arms and said, “Little one, I was worried for you, but I didn’t know you ran off because you were so thirsty. Your little legs must be tired, so I will carry you back,” and then he placed the lamb on his shoulders and carried it back to the flock. God was watching all this from Heaven, and when He saw how caring Moses was, He said to Himself, “At last, I’ve found the special person I’ve been searching for! I will make Moses the shepherd of My people, Israel.” Moses, of course, was a forerunner and prefiguring of Christ, Who came some 1200 years later to free His people from slavery to sin and lead them to eternal life. Jesus is the gate, or entry-way, to everlasting life and happiness—and as long as we remain united to Him, we have nothing to fear.

II. Development

Life on earth is a serious business, because it determines where we’ll spend eternity. Jesus once warned His followers, “strive to enter through the narrow gate, for the gate that leads to destruction is wide and the road is broad, and many choose to follow it” (Mt. 8:13). This vitally important message is echoed in today’s readings. Those who accept and follow Jesus find the path that leads to eternal life, but those who reject Him risk eternal damnation. That’s why, on the day of Pentecost, as described in the 1st Reading, Peter spoke to the people with a sense of urgency, telling them to be baptized in Christ’s Name, and exhorting them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” St. Peter also addresses us in the 2nd Reading, talking about Jesus as the only source of salvation, and reminding us, “For you had gone astray like sheep, but you have now returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.” We have received the gift of salvation, but it’s up to us to hold onto it by remaining united to Christ. As Our Lord says, “I am the gate for the sheep . . . Whoever enters through Me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture.” Jesus alone can help us find the way to true freedom, inner peace, and everlasting happiness.
III. Conclusion

There’s a passage from St. Paul’s 2nd Letter to Timothy that describes our day almost perfectly; it says, “For the time will come when people will not tolerate sound doctrine, but, following their own desires and insatiable curiosity, will accumulate [exotic] teachers and will stop listening to the truth and will be diverted to myths” (4:3-4). For at least fifty years now, we’ve been living in this time: an era in which our once-Christian society has become fascinated by Far Eastern religions, the New Age Movement, and bizarre religious cults, including such examples as the so-called Course in Miracles, Scientology, the Worldwide Church of God, Hare Krishna, the Unification Church, Transcendental Meditation, Wicca, and paganism. Some of these deceptions have infiltrated various Christian churches and even some Catholic parishes and religious orders. There are certain religious sisters, for instance, who practice and teach New Age meditation techniques; there are others who’ve rejected the idea of obedience to Christ as being nothing more than a means used by the male leadership of the Church to control them. Instead, they demand the ordination of women, pretend to celebrate Mass without a validly-ordained male priest present, and use a form of so-called creation spirituality to get in touch with and exalt their feminine nature. One graphic example of this was created some years back: a large crucifix in which Christ was portrayed as a woman—a blasphemous piece of art called “Christa.”

It’s no wonder very liberal or avant-garde religious orders like these, and some entire Christian denominations, are losing members and dying out, whereas traditional and faithful ones are thriving; Jesus Himself said that His sheep follow Him, but they will run away from a stranger. It is our responsibility to make sure we’re not following a stranger, or false shepherd, by mistake—and Our Lord provides us with all the spiritual resources we need to avoid danger and find our way to Him. First of all, we must pray for His guidance, asking to be enlightened by the Holy Spirit with His wisdom and truth. Secondly, we must pray that He will provide us with good shepherds, faithful spiritual leaders who genuinely care for His flock. Thirdly, we must reject any moral shortcuts and any ideas that contradict Scripture, Sacred Tradition, and the teaching of the Church—no matter how popular or alluring they may be. Fourthly, we must be willing to accept correction from those who have spiritual authority over us, listening to them humbly and taking their words to heart. Lastly, we ourselves must uphold Christ’s truth by our words and deeds, influencing others by our example, fidelity, and loving support as they too search for the truth.

Challenging times like these should make us more aware of what matters in life, and more determined not to be led astray. So many people today are traveling down easy and attractive spiritual dead ends. Jesus alone is the gateway to eternal life—and only by taking up our cross each day and remaining united to Him in the Church He established can we achieve the purpose of our existence, and help others do the same.