

Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, Apr 23rd 2024

“If you really are the Messiah, tell us so in plain words!” Here the problem faced by the Jews was, Jesus did not correspond to the Messiah or Christ of their understanding and imagination. They were certain that Jesus had extraordinary powers and ordinary people flocked to him to listen to him. And now Jesus identifying himself as a shepherd of his people raises concern for the religious leaders.

With a good grasp of the texts of the scripture, the religious leadership in Israel looked forward to a future king who would shepherd his people after the model of David. This future king carried the Jewish title Christ/Messiah. King David who had been a shepherd before being anointed the king, was lovingly regarded as the greatest Shepherd-King. Jews who questioned Jesus had a good knowledge of the of prophecies and psalms and therefore, they indeed suspected the claim of Jesus to be the shepherd: Would he be the Messiah the scriptures have foretold? But the problem was, they were not willing to accept a messiah, who did not conform to their imagination and understanding.

Misconceptions about Jesus could be a huge hinderance to people’s faith in God. How often do we hear people complaining that they do not want to believe in a God who does not answer their prayers or in a God who allowed misfortunes and tragedies to happen? They would prefer to believe in a God who confirms to their idea of God.

Once again Jesus emphasises on the requirement of listening: “My sheep hear my voice, I know them, and they follow me.” Listening to the voice of God – the Word of God – seems to be the paramount requirement to belong to Jesus. In the Gospels, the term “hear” means to listen, to understand, to assimilate and to carry out what is heard.

Who are the people who listened to this voice of the shepherd and followed? His chosen disciples and the people who accompanied him ... They listened to his voice, allowed his words to make amends in their lives. And to them, Jesus assures their reward: they are already in eternal life with God and to eternity they will not perish. Safe in the hand of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, the disciples are safe in the Father’s hand, the original shepherd of Israel [Ezekiel 34:15]. Remember, Jesus had given a similar assurance when he talked about the bread of life [Jn 6:37, 39].

As always, Words of Jesus evokes two types of reactions – some believe and others do not. Faith comes from listening... when you don’t listen, there cannot have faith in Jesus