**Homily for 4th Sunday of Easter**(5/12/2019)

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 In the Gospel today, using the image of a Good Shepherd watching over and protecting his sheep, Jesus reminds us we are safe and secure, even in a dangerous world, because He is our Good Shepherd and we are His flock.

 Jesus explaining to us that no one can take His sheep out of His hands and that no one can take us out of His Father’s hands.

 In the dry land in Palestine where Jesus lived, the sheep depend on their shepherd, and their shepherd cares for them. The sheep cannot survive without a shepherd. The shepherd finds water and grass for the sheep, and the sheep listen and follow their shepherd.

 And, every night, the shepherd brings the sheep into the sheepfold. Once the sheep are inside for the night, the shepherd sleep at the door all night. The sheep cannot get out without stepping over the shepherd’s body, which means they do not get out at all during the night.

 We hear Jesus’ comforting words in the Gospel, and we want to trust His good hands, but the world is filled with wolves and all kinds of other dangers for us sheep. So, we may be tempted to wonder and question: “What kind of safety is it that Jesus offers when it is obvious that His sheep still suffer and die at the hands of evil people and from natural disasters?”

 If, for example, we are in the safe hands of Jesus and His Father, why do natural disasters take the lives of innocent people? Where were the hands of God while war and terror take the lives of thousands of victims? Why doesn’t the hand of God shield Christian missionaries from martyrdom in hostile countries?

 And, where is God’s protective hand when cancer or a drunk driver strikes down a faithful Christian in the prime of life? These are difficult questions. Why do bad things happen to good people?

 First of all, suffering is not a sign of God’s disfavor. Nor is the lack of suffering a sign of God’s favor. We live in a broken world with other broken, sinful human beings, so we are open to being wounded by the brokenness of creation. Yes, it is true. Sometimes, good people do suffer and bad people prosper. It has always been that way. We live in an imperfect world.

 Secondly, let’s carefully look at the words of Jesus in today’s Gospel. He is saying that we are safe only in God’s hands. He doesn’t assure us that we are safe in the hands of other people or in the hands of other things.

 Jesus is not offering us an insurance policy against all sufferings. And, God will not necessarily remove all our problems. But, He has promised to be with us and help us and encourage us in the midst of those problems.

 No matter what happens to us, no matter what evil may befall us, even our own death or the death of a loved one, nothing shall separate us from the safe, loving grip of the hands of God. God is always with us. Which is better: facing life’s problems and hurts without God, or facing them with Him?

 Jesus Himself did not escape suffering and death at the hands of evil people and God’s hand did not spare Him from the cross. But, the hand of God, His Father, held Jesus, even when His own hands were nailed to the cross and when Jesus’ hands fell limp by His side in death.

 Then, it was by the strong hands of God that Jesus was raised from the grave and He now sits at the right hand of God in glory. The cross shows the depth of His divine love, and the Resurrection shows the extent of His divine power. Nothing can ever separate us from Him.

 In the midst of a world filled with danger, hatred, and war, the words of Jesus are still true to us. “Do not be afraid. Just have faith. Your faith will save you.”

 He comes to us in the hospital room or in the midst of a family tragedy. He comes to us in the midst of an unexpected business reversal or health crisis. And, He says, “Don’t worry. Don’t be afraid. I am alive, and I am here to help you.”

 If you are looking for good, strong hands that can hold you in your suffering and can carry you over the final passage of death itself, then God’s hands alone are the ones you need.

 Jesus knows each and everyone of us by our names, and we know Him by His name, Jesus Christ. Every hour, every day in every part of the world, the Risen Christ is sending His grace to bring back the lost and to embrace His flock.

 Where the flock is, there is the shepherd. When the flock may be in difficult terrain, experiencing terrible storms, or be attacked by enemies, always the Good Shepherd is with them. With the Good Shepherd, we will find restful water and refreshment for the soul.

 Whether we are on a cliff or in a valley, here, we will find the Lord’s guidance. Here, we will find the table of the Lord for us. Here, we will find the entry way to dwelling in the Lord’s house forever with true happiness.