

4th Sunday of Easter

As you know, Imagination plays an important role in Ignatian Spirituality. This morning I would like to imagine a conversation that I have with Pope Francis.

Yesterday I was walking down 16th St and there was someone standing outside looking at the banner that says 'Refugees and Immigrants Welcome'. He stopped me and said, "Perdon, I see that the name of this parish is San Francisco Xavier, A Jesuit saint. Is this a Jesuit parish?" "Why, yes", I said, "and I happen to be the pastor"

"Vos sois el pastor? Mucho gusto enconocerlo", he said. "Soy Francisco, el Papa." Well to tell you the truth, I didn't recognize him at first until he spoke. I recognized his voice and his Argentinian accent (You know, my sheep recognize my voice and he is the Good Shepherd).

So Francis says to me, "This is a very powerful message! Refugees and Immigrants Welcome.! Gracias pero tengo una pregunta. I have a question for you the pastor. Why are there Gates and locks here? You say "bienvenidos a todos" welcome to all but these gates are not very welcoming! They say "Do Not Enter" YOU ARE NOT ALLOWED IN!"

"Oh, My Papa", I say. "We're in NY. There are security issues. I'm told they put the gates in because people, homeless people were sleeping on the steps. We can't have that!"

"Ay caramba, mi querido pastor, those people are your sheep. You must care for them."

"Pero, espera, Papa. Wait. Gates aren't necessarily "bad". They are used for protection. Like in the Gospel, Jesus says "I am the Gate". There needed to be a gate for the sheepfold for protection of the sheep. To keep them safe from thieves and robbers."

Ay, mi querido pastor, but did you know

During Jesus' time, shepherds protected their flocks with their own bodies. A sheep pen was merely a wall of loosely connected rocks with a single entrance. At night the shepherd slept across the entrance so that his body became a protection for the sheep from their own straying or from marauders. The body of the shepherd kept the sheep from wandering out and getting hurt as well as kept

animals and bandits from entering the pen and attacking the sheep.”

“Oh, my Papa, are you suggesting that we should open the gates and I should sleep with the sheep on the steps?”

And he looked at me with a sonrisa, a smile and said “That’s what I would do”

I guess the Pope is right. It doesn’t seem very welcoming when you have a “gated” church that is locked up tight. If we lived in a perfect world, we wouldn’t have to put gates up, and locks on gates and doors. People could come and go as they please like the sheep in the sheepfold, knowing that the Shepherd would see to their well being.

So I imagine Francis returning the next morning, it’s a Sunday and he sees me and says, “Mi querido, pastor, my dear pastor. A mi me gusta esto. Todos las puertas y los portones son abiertos. All the doors and gates are open. The sheep of your flock can come and go and I see many of your sheep are waiting to be fed.”

“Yes”, I say with more relief and a little pride. “The Xavier mission sets a welcome table for more than a thousand homeless every Sunday.”

“Bueno! Me hace pensar en el salmo de hoy. It makes me think of one of the most beloved psalms. El señor es mi pastor, nada me falta” “Yes”, I say, “The lord is my shepherd there is nothing I shall want. I think it’s most people’s favorite out of all 150 psalms. You have set a table before me, you anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows. Only goodness and kindness shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the lord.”

And Francis’ final words? “Si, pero tienes que abrir las puertas de de la casa del Señor”! In other words, open the doors, unlock the gates. (At least open the gates of your heart!) Let the sheep of the flock enter through the Gate who is Jesus.

