

The Paper Pulpit

(Reflections from the Pastor)

4th Sunday in Easter

Scripture: The Fourth Sunday of Easter each year of the three-year cycle of gospels is traditionally known as "**Good Shepherd**" **Sunday** because the Lord Jesus is the good shepherd of his flock.

John 10:1-10 "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber; but he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens; the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers." This figure Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. So Jesus again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers; but the sheep did not heed them. I am the door; if any one enters by me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

We are surrounded by many voices. There's rarely a moment within our waking lives that someone or something isn't calling out to us and, even in our sleep, dreams and nightmares ask for our attention. And each voice has its own particular cadence and message. Some voices invite us in, promising us life if we do this or that or buy a certain product or idea; others threaten us. Some voices beckon us towards hatred, bitterness, and anger, while others challenge us towards love, graciousness, and forgiveness. Some voices tell us they are playful and humorous, not to be taken seriously. Then there is God's voice. Within all of these: Which is the voice of God? How do we recognize God's voice among and within all of these voices? That's not easy to answer. God, as the scriptures tell us, is the author of everything that's good. Hence, God's voice is inside of many things that are not explicitly connected to faith and religion, but how do we discern that?

Jesus leaves us a wonderful metaphor to work with. He tells us that he is the "Good Shepherd" and that his sheep will recognize his voice among all other voices. In sharing this metaphor, he is drawing upon a practice that was common among shepherds at the time: At night, for protection and companionship, shepherds would put their flocks together into a common enclosure. They would then separate the sheep in the morning by using their voices. Each shepherd had trained his sheep to be attuned to his voice and his voice only. The shepherd would walk away from the enclosure calling his sheep, often times by their individual names, and they would follow him. His sheep were so attuned to his voice that they would not follow the voice of another shepherd, even if that shepherd tried to trick them by imitating the voice of their own shepherd. Like a baby who, at a point, will no longer be cuddled by the voice of a babysitter, but wants and needs the voice of the mother, each sheep recognized intimately the voice that was safeguarding them and would not follow another voice.

So too with us: of all the voices that surround us, how do we discern the unique cadence of God's voice? Which is the voice of the Good Shepherd? There's no easy answer and sometimes the best we can do is to trust our gut feeling about right and wrong. But we have a number of principles that come to us from Jesus, from scripture, His Church, and from the deep wells of our Christian tradition that can help us. My summer bible study can assist you in determining God's voice in your life.

Vocations: Jesus never leaves his flock unattended. He tells St. Peter, our 1st Pope to "feed my lambs, feed my sheep." Bishops have a shepherds hook (crosier) as a symbol of their office. Where do the shepherds (priests/bishops) come from today? From our parishes. Wouldn't it be great if a few men would study to be priests from St. Max's. I got to believe that God is calling at least one guy from our parish to be a priest. How about you? If you know someone you think would make a good priest, ask him. Asking someone to be a priest is the number one way of invitation.

Men of the Parish: I am asking all men of the parish to join our Men's Group under the umbrella of the Knights of Columbus. We will have a First Degree next Sunday after the 10:00 Mass followed by a light lunch. I need to know who will be joining us (which I hope would be each of you). We need to know how much to plan for lunch. Please let me know by this Thursday.

Sincerely in Christ, Fr. Jim Trempe