

## Homily For the 4th Sunday of Easter - Year A

### St Peter's Sat 5:00, Sun 11:30 & 5:00 Masses - April 30, 2023

**Acts 2:14,36-41** "Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said: what should we do?"

**Psalm 23:1-6** "Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil, for you are with me."

**1 Peter 2:20-25** "To this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you."

**John 10:1-10** "The sheep follow the shepherd because they know his voice."

### The Voice That Means Everything

#### Introduction

Bible images of sheep can be confusing. I don't know anyone who spends much time around sheep. I always have mixed feelings about being compared to sheep in Sacred Scripture. I guess they are not that bright as animals go. However, they do have a wise quality that makes sure of their survival. They have learned to trust the one person who CAN ensure their survival - **the shepherd**. The shepherd makes sure that they have enough food, and that **they** don't become food for a wild animal or a poacher.

I found out first hand that sheep have another quality that I personally really admire. My wife and I were walking along a pilgrimage trail in southern France. We passed through grazing lands where there were sheep and cows by the many thousands. At one point, we could see in the distance a herd coming towards us. Gradually, I realized that they were sheep. Slowly I came to see that there were perhaps a thousand or more, and that they were coming directly for us, with several shepherds in front and behind. My next realization was that they were actually moving quite quickly and that we would not be able to get out of the way before they reached us. For some reason, I thought of how the news would be reported, that a deacon and his wife had been trampled to death by a herd of sheep. I had never seen that headline before. But there was nothing to do but stand very close together and hope. Just as the lead sheep got to us, they simply made a perfect space around us, neither hitting us nor seeming to be phased by our presence. So many sheep able to follow their shepherds in harmony!

Today is the 4th Sunday of the Easter season. Every year at this time, the Good News is from the Gospel of John, Chapter 10, where Jesus speaks of *himself* as the **Good Shepherd**, who invites those who hear his voice, to be his flock, his sheep, to follow him, to be a part of his kingdom of love.

### **The Shepherd's Voice**

I suggest my number one task today, and yours, is to decide once again, or maybe for the first time, whether I will choose to make the voice of Jesus the single most important voice in my life. This is no little thing. This is our life. This is the voice that means everything. If we are not following the voice of Jesus, the shepherd who lays down his life for us, then you must know what voice you are following as the guiding principle of your life.

There are a lot of strange voices out there, and we are free to follow any one or many of them. That's the difference between us and sheep. God never forces his authority on us. He makes us free to follow him or to reject him and go our own way. But, if we know that the God who made us, didn't need to make us. That God made us to share in his own blessed life. God made us for a profound happiness that we call joy, or peace, or true contentment. Yet, we are free to get used to and follow any voice we want. We can literally or virtually follow anyone on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or whatever.

The goal of the accusers of Jesus and his followers today is to silence the voice of the shepherd. There is a concerted effort to remove the Christian faith from the centre of culture. We hear those voices loud and clear: "Religion is a private matter between you and God." "Religion is the cause of most wars." "Religion was rammed down my throat when I was growing up so I will let my kids make up their own mind." "I am offended by other people imposing their religious images on me in public." Our response must be that of Peter: "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among human beings by which we must be saved."

Are you worried about suffering at the end of life. The voice of the world says you should ask for a doctor to end your life so you don't have to suffer, and so you

won't be a burden to your family. It's the right problem. But it's the wrong solution. I know that there are individual cases of great suffering that makes this seem a compassionate solution and I really do empathize with those families. So how do I know that voice is wrong? Because Christ always affirms life over death. Because that worldly solution has no natural place to stop. That voice told us euthanasia would only be for those who are terminally ill, and that there would be many safeguards so that it would not be abused. But those safeguards are gone, one by one, in every place that this has been implemented. And now there is a move to allow young people to make the same choice if life seems overwhelming. But I say to you that, for the youth, their lives often seem overwhelming because they don't have the voice of the shepherd in their ear to remind them of how loved they are.

The voice of Christ says I have made you for love. I have made you for compassion. There will always be suffering. Don't kill them. Walk with them. Bear their suffering with them. The story has been often told of the earthquake in Armenia, where a school had been buried in rubble. As people gradually gave up digging for children survivors, one man, the father of a boy named Armand would not give up. Bleeding after dozens of hours of removing rubble with no break, calling out to his son, Armand heard his father's voice, telling others trapped with him, "I told you my father would come. That's the voice of the heavenly father. There is no suffering so great that I did not send my son to be with you in your suffering. You are never alone with the voice of Jesus.

### **Learn to know his voice**

We need to learn where to hear the voice of our shepherd. Why, then, should we follow the voice of Jesus? What does he say about himself that we should follow him? "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry." "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness." "I am the gate. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will find pasture." "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die."

One time, most of the people around Jesus stopped following him. He asked those closest to him if they were going to leave also. Peter spoke for the rest of them when he said: To whom else shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Do you hear what Peter was saying? They were often confused and they did not know everything that was going to happen or what Jesus meant, but they had come to understand that there was no one under heaven to whom they could entrust themselves more than him. So Peter said, we don't totally get it but we trust you because no one else loves like you do. To Pilate Jesus said, "I came into the world to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." And to the disciples, he said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

In our own lives, and in people we know, we can also hear the voice of the Good Shepherd. My father has been gone for a number of years, but his voice remains with me. For the first time since he passed away, I had a dream about him recently. He had that same assuring voice of a father, though not perfect, who made sure my brothers and I knew how much he loved us. He did this when we wrestled with him on the living room floor, and after hockey games when he told us how great we played, even if we didn't think so ourselves. It may not be a father whose voice was like this for you, but I pray you can remember someone who was the voice of Christ for you. All of us, wherever we are and whoever we are with, need to notice when someone needs us to be the voice of the shepherd.

And when I saw my son being born, I knew something that I did not know before. I knew that I would die for him. But what does Jesus say? I would die for you. For all of you. For any of you. I will die for you. I did die for you. Now I live with you. Now do the same. Be willing to die a little bit every day. Die to your selfishness. Die to your pride. Die to your addictions. Let those things die in you that would keep you from truly living. Then follow the voice of the shepherd to your eternal reward.

## **What's Your Vocation**

The first shepherds of the Church were the Apostles. They were given the shepherd's voice to lead the Church. They were to act in his name.

We also call this Sunday, 'World Day of Prayer for Vocations' because it is a particular time of prayer for vocations to the priesthood and religious life, for men and women to step forward and be shepherds. There are young men within the sound of my voice right now who are being called to be shepherds. I pray that you and your parents will listen to him. There are young men and women, boys and girls here who are called to be religious sisters and brothers, or to be leaders in other ways, to be the voice of Jesus. But everyone has a vocation, a calling, to participate in shepherding people and situations around us. We have some great shepherd priests, but it's not only their task to echo the Good Shepherd's voice.

There was a young man who radically changed the direction of his life because he thought he was called to the priesthood. But then he left seminary to date a long time girlfriend. But then she broke up with him. Confused, he asked God: What am I supposed to do? The answer God gave him in prayer: Serve those around you.

In the catacombs of Rome there are many drawn images of Jesus with a lamb over his shoulders. The Christians buried their dead and celebrated mass in the same place. They prayed that Jesus would carry the souls of their beloved to the Father. Our prayer today is the same, that he will shepherd us and bring us to the Father.

This week there is no substitute for spending time listening to the shepherd, in his word or at mass or in prayer. This won't happen by accident or what has been called the 8th sacrament, "holy osmosis." We have to actively listen. We have to train ourselves to listen. This week sit down and listen for the voice of the shepherd. His voice means everything.

## **Key Verses Today**

**Entrance Antiphon:** *The merciful love of the Lord fills the earth. By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, alleluia.*

**Collect:** *Almighty ever-living God, lead us to a share in the joys of heaven, so that the flock may reach where the Shepherd has one before.*

**Acts:** *When the day of Pentecost had come, Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd, "Let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." Now when the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said, "Brothers, what should we do?" Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." That day were added about three thousand souls.*

**Psalm:** *The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil, for you are with me. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.*

**1 Peter:** *Beloved, if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God's approval. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you. When he was abused, and when he suffered, he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. Christ bore our sins in his body on the cross so that we might live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.*

**John:** *Jesus said, "Very truly I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate is a thief. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. The sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will run from a stranger because they do not know the voice of strangers." They did not understand so again Jesus said, "Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. Whoever enters by me will be saved and will find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."*