

## Fourth Sunday of Easter: The Voice of the Shepherd

The Fourth Sunday of Easter can be called Good Shepherd Sunday. The Gospel reading is taken from the tenth chapter of the *Gospel of John*. The first part of this chapter presents Jesus as the One whose voice his sheep know. The second part of the chapter presents Jesus as the shepherd who searches for his lost sheep.

In a world where so many people are looking for a voice to lead them, there is only one voice that matters. World leaders and all politicians for that matter attract people fanatically dedicated to them, but at best their voices lead only to limited solutions to the complex problems of life. The voice that matters is the Voice of the Lord.

There are many voices in the world. We have to listen carefully for the voices that are coming from the Lord and for the voices that are not the voice of our shepherd.

There is the voice that says, "You can do this or that now. Everyone is doing this. Join in. What makes you think that you are different?" Or, perhaps the voice says, "Times have changed. Get with the modern way." This voice is tempting us to destruction, self destruction. If we follow it, we wander away from Christian morality in order to be part of the world. Soon, we realize that we have wandered away from our own happiness. That happens when we follow a voice that is not the voice of our Shepherd. People will often justify their actions by saying, "This was right for me. I was following my conscience." Not really. We might be following our selfish desires, but not our consciences. A middle age man and a lady half his age once came to see me and told me that their consciences called them together. They wanted to be married. He had just left his wife and their four children. He was sure that God wanted them together. He said his conscience was telling him that. Not all desires come from the conscience. Some come from selfishness. We can easily deceive ourselves in taking courses of action that do not exhibit the way of the Lord. "If it feels good, do it," is not the way of the Lord. Following the voice of the Lord is often a challenge, a battle we have to put up against the world around us and against the selfishness within us. When we listen to the voice of the Lord we will have to embrace suffering, as Peter says in today's second reading. But we will be able to sleep well now in this world and eternally in the next.

There is the voice that says, "In life, it is dog eat dog. This is the way of the world. You are either stepping on someone on your way up, or you are getting stepped on. You are either raising yourself up, or you are falling down." This is quite obvious in the business world, but this voice is not limited to the business world. You hear this voice wherever there are people seeking to gain some form of superiority over others. This could be in the neighborhoods. There are groups in the neighborhood association where people use others to rise to some form of authority, be it political or social. As followers of Jesus Christ, we know that any voice that leads us to hurt others is not the

voice of the Lord.

I want to tell you about another voice that causes great destruction. This is the voice within ourselves that tell us that we are not good enough. This is not the voice of the Lord. The Lord is merciful. He sees our failings, our sins, and he offers us his Divine Mercy. The voice of evil tells us to give up and stay in the mud. The voice of the Lord says, "No, we can beat this together. Don't give up. Get up." Listen to this voice: "Don't give up, get up." Isn't that what the Lord said to that women who had been caught in adultery. There she was, lying on the ground, lying in her shame. She was waiting to die, but Jesus saved her from those who were about to stone her. And then He saved her from herself.

"Rise and sin no more," He said to her.

"Don't give up, get up," He says to you and me.

This is the voice we need to listen to. This is the voice of the Lord.

In *Philippians 4:13* St. Paul writes, "I can conquer all things in Him who empowers me." And so can we. There is a voice that tells us that we are **not** too weak to live the Christian life. There is a voice that tells us to trust in God. There is a voice that tells us that Christ is calling us to new adventures in holiness, to new heights, to a new relationship with Him.

A number of years ago the contemporary Christian Group Hillsong United published a meditation on the voice of the Lord. The song was based on the voice of the Lord calling Peter out of the boat of comfort and into abandonment to the Lord. Its two most powerful verses are:

Spirit lead me where my trust is without borders  
Let me walk upon the waters  
Wherever You would call me  
Take me deeper than my feet could ever wander  
And my faith will be made stronger  
In the presence of my Savior.

And the second powerful verse:

I will call upon Your Name  
Keep my eyes above the waves  
My soul will rest in Your embrace  
I am Yours and You are mine. © CCLI License #2368115

I am Yours and You are mine. We are his sheep. He is our shepherd. We are His. How can anything in the world surpass that? We belong to God, and He belongs to us. That is the joy of the Gospel.

There are predators out there. They are trying to entice us away from our Shepherd. We need to know their voices, and we need to realize where they are trying to take us. We know the voice of God. And we know where He wants to lead us. We pray today for the courage to listen to His Voice and follow our shepherd.