

EASTER SUNDAY IV “C”
MAY 11/12, 2019

It’s a happy convergence that today’s observance of the Fourth Sunday of Easter, “Good Shepherd Sunday”, aligns with the civil calendar’s observance of “Mothers’ Day.” In many ways mothers embody the traits and lifestyles of shepherds more so than we men do. Beginning at conception, the whole of a shepherd-mother’s life is united with her “sheep” her “lamb”—the child of her womb. The mother-shepherd literally feeds her offspring at her breast with the living food within her. The mother-shepherd binds up her offspring’s wounds—the skinned knee, the bruised ego. The mother-shepherd “anoints” her offspring’s head with the oil of forgiveness, encouragement, and yes, when necessary, prods the reluctant or recalcitrant lamb with the tip of her shepherd’s staff in rebuke or challenge. The mother-shepherd will defend her sheep from danger even to laying down her life if necessary. We’ve all heard the familiar saying: “Never get between a mama bear and her cubs.” Men (especially fathers) are also equally called to emulate and incarnate these shepherd traits in their care for their spouse and children.

Pope Francis finds the image of shepherd instructive as well. Good Shepherd Sunday marks the day on which we pay special attention to the vocation of priests and bishops—those called by God and ordained by the church to exercise shepherding ministry in the person and model of Jesus. The pope speaks of the role of bishops and priests as shepherds as being one of closeness to the people among whom they live and work. In his famous analogy the Holy Father bluntly states, bishops and priests are to have the “smell of the sheep” about them in their vocation. Please pray for the Holy Father, the bishops and priests of the church, and for me, that we may remain true to, and persevere in, our God-given call. Please also pray that those God is calling to priestly ministry may answer his call joyfully and offer their lives to the service of God’s people.

Mother, father, pope, bishop, priest, man, woman, young, old—whoever we are, all of us who have heard the voice of Jesus as the members of his flock are called to follow him on the way of discipleship.

It would be easy to follow Jesus if he were physically here upon the earth, healing the sick and curing the lame. Who wouldn't leave everything to do that? But it's much more difficult to be attentive to the voice of Jesus after the resurrection. And that is precisely what today's gospel passage requires of us. We are to listen closely amidst the noise and sound of our world and discern the voice of the Good Shepherd. What is he calling us to do? Where does he want us to go? We would like to follow him, but how do we hear his voice?

If we are going to be able to hear and heed the voice of Jesus the Shepherd that means that we must first ask ourselves what voices we listen to, which voices do we give our time and attention to, which voices shape our values, attitudes, world views? Is it CNN, FOX, Facebook, Instagram, or some other broadcast or social internet media outlet? Is it a particular print or broadcast media commentator? Is it my partisan political party or, in the case of the church, my chosen theological or devotional ideology to the exclusion of other voices—even possibly God's? Whose? St. Benedict opens his "Rule" by stating: "*Listen with the ear of your heart.*"

Listening with the "ear of the heart", hearing, and following the voice of Jesus the Shepherd requires consciously and deliberately choosing to "turn off the blab" of the world for a time—the radio, the live-stream on our electronic devices, the television, and carve out space for silence and prayer, speaking and listening to God. For those of us who committed to the 1% Challenge in our Evangelical Catholic process, how is this going? As a parish we've made a concerted effort to provide scripturally based print materials to assist all of us in setting aside 5, 10, or more minutes a day for prayer. They're free for the taking. The invitation to Eucharistic Adoration in the Burke Chapel is always open. Quiet time in the presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament exposed on the altar can work wonders. This being May, don't forget about the rosary. With the Blessed Mother as our companion praying its mysteries is a way of entering into the life of Jesus.

On this Mothers' Day, Good Shepherd Sunday, we contemplate God's care for us, commit ourselves to listening and heeding his voice, as we are joined to the multitude around the altar of Jesus the Shepherd/Lamb.