



Bringing Home the Word

Fourth Sunday of Easter (A)
April 30, 2023

Matters of Life and Death

By Sr. Dianne Bergant, CSA

Sheep are a lot smarter than some people think. They recognize the voice of their particular shepherd and follow that voice alone. However, that is not the point of Jesus' teaching today. Because most of us don't raise sheep or know much about them, we may not realize the situation described in today's Gospel is a matter of life and death.

It's similar to the relationship between a military squad leader and the troops he leads, another life-and-death matter. In both, unquestioning obedience is required, and absolute trust in the other is presumed.

That's what Jesus is describing. He's suggesting: "Listen to me. Follow my lead. Trust in me. I want only what is good for you, so I will be your sure protection."

It sounds so easy, as parables and metaphors usually do. What does it mean to follow this Shepherd? In the first reading, Peter announces the answer in one word: "Repent!" There is that challenging word—the word we might associate with Lent, not with Easter. If we do so, we miss the point of following the Shepherd, for to follow him means to be like him. It means: "Repent! Stop taking advantage of other people. Open your minds and hearts to newcomers. Respect those who observe different religious traditions. Help those less fortunate than you." All of this is captured in the final words of the Gospel reading: do what you can so that all "might have life and have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). Clearly, that's smart. †

Sunday Readings

Acts 2:14a, 36–41

Peter [said] to them, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ."

1 Peter 2:20b–25

For you had gone astray like sheep, but you have now returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.

John 10:1–10

[Jesus said,] "The sheep hear his voice, as he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out."

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A Word from Pope Francis

How can we recognize the voice of the Good Shepherd from that of the thief, how can we distinguish the inspiration of God from the suggestion of the evil one? One can learn to discern these two voices: they speak two different languages, that is, they have opposite ways of knocking on [the door of] our hearts.

REGINA CAELI, ROME, MAY 3, 2020



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Do I find myself torn between two ways to act, two paths?
- Is there someone who can help me discern the voice of God?

We Are Part of the Flock that Gathers

By Fr. Daniel P. Horan, OFM

*Enter, let us bow down in worship;
let us kneel before the LORD who made us.
For he is our God,
we are the people he shepherds,
the sheep in his hands.
Oh, that today you would hear his voice.*

Psalm 95:6-7

It is nice to belong. The prayer of this psalm alludes to the communal reality of our faith: we are not alone in our relationship with God but part of a larger flock. Too often the messages we receive from the cultures and society around us lead us to believe that what is most important is the fulfillment of our individual desires or wants; that we should look out for ourselves first and then maybe consider others; and that it is even foolish to put the needs or interests of others before our own. Sometimes a culture of individualism and self-centeredness creeps into the practice of our faith and views of the world.



People who focus on their “personal relationship with Jesus” to the exclusion of what that relationship means for how they relate to others have succumbed to this temptation to individualism. In Christianity, there is no such thing as an “independent” Christian or a “sole proprietor” Christian or a “rogue” Christian. Christianity has one flock, one vine, one kingdom where all can gather.

As we continue our journey of faith, may we join the psalmist in giving praise and worship to the God who loves us all, who loves us together, and who guides us by means of the Holy Spirit. May we recognize that what I do for my sisters and brothers is, as Jesus says in Matthew 25, worth far more than what I say with my words or claim to believe in my heart. God remains steadfast as our Good Shepherd. We—God’s people—must remember we are first and foremost a flock with others in this life. †

***There is no such thing as
an independent Christian.***

How do we become people of discernment, listening for the voice of God within? We might start by believing that God’s voice is there; that Jesus keeps his promises and sent the Holy Spirit to live within us. Then we might reduce the clamor. A life filled with meetings, projects, and “free time” on the phone or shopping or surfing the Internet or watching TV is a very noisy existence and not conducive to hearing the still, small voice of God. It is important to measure what we hear against the wisdom of the words of Jesus, the commandments, the beatitudes, and the teaching of our Church. A spiritual director can help us sift through the many voices that vie for our attention and become attuned to God’s voice. When we hear the true Shepherd’s voice, it seems the most familiar. It is familiar, certainly not the voice of a stranger.

Paige Byrne Shortal

PRAYER

*Lord Jesus, when we fail to hear
your word or listen to your Spirit
within us, please open our minds
and hearts to your voice, we pray.
Amen! Alleluia!*

The Redemptorists

WEEKDAY READINGS

May 1-6

Monday, Easter Weekday:

Acts 11:1-18 / Jn 10:11-18

Tuesday, St. Athanasius:

Acts 11:19-26 / Jn 10:22-30

Wednesday, Sts. Philip and James:

1 Cor 15:1-8 / Jn 14:6-14

Thursday, Easter Weekday:

Acts 13:13-25 / Jn 13:16-20

Friday, Easter Weekday:

Acts 13:26-33 / Jn 14:1-6

Saturday, Easter Weekday:

Acts 13:44-52 / Jn 14:7-14

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