

Hearing the Voice of the Good Shepherd
May 8, 2022
Gospel of John 10:27-30
Fr. John

On this fourth Sunday of the Easter season, we are given one of the gospel passages that refer to Christ as the Good Shepherd. It often prompts the pastor to give a homily on vocations to the ordained priesthood and in the course of that perhaps doing a little bit of recruiting for the clergy. [maybe like something of an oral version of those old military posters that said: 'Uncle Sam wants you'; or 'Join the navy and see the world!']

Well I decided not to go that route on this occasion - not because I am bashful or in any way even apologetic about the personal calling or vocation that I responded to. It was the right one for me. And maybe I best save those remarks for a younger audience who are still pondering a direction in life. However, on this Good Shepherd Sunday, we need to cast a somewhat broader net in terms of understanding that we are all called to participate in the work of the Good Shepherd.

No matter what our calling: ordained, married, single life, consecrated life - we are all called to be role models and mentors especially to our young people. How we embrace and are faithful to living out our calling becomes the way we express our discipleship in following Christ.

Every calling demands sacrificing certain freedoms in order to be free to respond to the specific responsibilities to which God has called us.

As a priest, I gave up the opportunity to marry, and have a family in order to inherit a larger family. Married people sacrifice their singlehood to focus on their spouse and children. Single and consecrated people [like the folks at the Marian Centre] offer their lives in the service of the larger community - often beyond the bounds of the institutional Church. All of us reach out to different segments of our society according to our stations in life.

Today's gospel reading speaks about hearing, recognizing, and following the voice of the Good Shepherd. It reminds me of the trademark of the old RCA Victor recording company which had a picture of a dog with his ear tilted to an early gramophone with the caption: 'His Master's Voice.'

It's interesting how animals recognize and respond to the voice of one who feeds and looks after them. I often wonder if we as human beings have that same kind of trust in our Creator and in Christ the Good Shepherd.

The familiar voice of Jesus was how Mary Magdalene first recognized the risen Christ at the tomb; how the disciple recognized Jesus when He called to them from shore, and how Saul, on his way to Damascus, heard a voice; 'I am Jesus, who you are persecuting.'

Indeed 'My sheep hear my voice, I know them and they follow me.'

These days, we may not hear that voice in the same way that the early disciples did. But we hear it in voices of our elders - those who have had a greater experience of life and have accumulated the wisdom of the ages. We hear it in the sounds and even the silence of our natural environment if we have ever taken the time to slow down, listen, and ponder how God speaks to us in contemplative silence.

Yes, taking the time to listen - not just hearing with our ears or heads but listening with our hearts.

Next week the priests of our diocese will be on retreat. I have made dozens of retreats over the decades and if you were to ask me what I remember about any of them, I probably couldn't tell you. However, I do recall a line that the retreat master kept repeating on the very first retreat that I ever made over 55 years ago. It came from one of the psalms: 'If today you **hear His voice**, harden not your hearts'. Indeed may we all listen for 'our Master's voice.'