

Fourth Sunday of Easter A - Whose voice are we listening to?

April 26, 2026

In Canada, most of our ranches are self-contained which means that the rancher has his own fields for crops or grazing and his own facilities to care for his livestock. That is not the case in most of the world, not just the ancient world of Jesus, but even in the modern world. In most places, the animals belonging to various families are kept together in a large pen. This is particularly true regarding sheep. In order to pick out his own sheep, the shepherd just stands at the entrance of the pen, calls his sheep with a peculiar cry and his sheep know his voice and follow him out. Now sheep are not good at recognizing localities, which explains why they can easily go astray. I remember when we visited my wife's sister in New Zealand, we took a guided tour and the tour guide told us there're more sheep than people in the country. Sure enough, we saw sheep everywhere in the country side and I was wondering where their shepherd was. Most of the time when the sheep gets lost, it panics. It falls to the ground and bleats loudly in hopes that it will attract the shepherd to bring it back to the fold. That's why it is very important for the sheep to listen to the voice of the shepherd and follow him.

Jesus says that he is the Good Shepherd. His sheep know his voice. We are His sheep. Do we know His voice? There are many voices in the world. We have to be careful in distinguishing the voices that are coming from the Lord and those that are not. 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. St Paul says "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God..." (Rom 12.2) When we follow a voice that is not the voice of our Shepherd, we wandered away from our own happiness, even our safety. There is also a voice that says, "This is right for me. I'm following my conscience." Not really. We might be following our selfish desires, but not our consciences. A senior man and his wife once came to see me when I was serving as a deacon in the Fort McMurray St. John the Baptist Church, and told me that their consciences called them to get married in a church. They wanted to be married after living together for a long time. He was sure that God wanted him and his wife together officially. I told him he and his wife needed to join the RCIA and get baptized first. He said his conscience was telling him exactly that. Not all desires come from the conscience. Some come from selfishness, taking action that do not exhibit the way of the Lord. Then there is the voice that says, "If it feels good, do it," This 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 hear the voice of the Lord we will have to embrace suffering, as Peter says in today's second reading (1 Peter 2: 20b-25). But we will be able to sleep well now in this world and eternally in the next.

There is also a voice that says, "In life, it is dog eats 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. 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 tells 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 woman who was caught in adultery? They

dragged her to Jesus and threw her down in front of Him. They wanted to see where his kindness would be since the Law said that such a woman had to be stoned to death. But the accusers all left when Jesus said that the one without sin should throw the first stone. So, there she was, lying on the ground, lying in her shame. She was waiting to die. She probably wanted to die. But Jesus 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. Today's Gospel (John 10: 1-10) forces us to ask ourselves, "Whose voice am I following? Is it the voice of the immoral elements of our society? Is it the voice of the popular but self-absorbed? Is it the voice of our own selfishness? Or do I follow the voice of the Lord?" When we know the true shepherd's voice through informed faith, we will not follow false shepherds or mistake the attraction of self-centred fantasies for the voice of the true Messiah. Jesus is the model for all who are called to leadership, he is the gate by which we enter the fold of his faithful.

This Sunday is sometimes referred to as the Good Shepherd Sunday. We are all precious in the eyes of God. Each of us has a special place in his heart as he calls us by name and cares for us individually. He is our guardian and guide, constantly calling us home when we are inclined to wander and stray. His everlasting love never gives up on us. He keeps knocking at the door of our hearts seeking an entrance until we open. We need constant reminding that our calling is to be shepherds after the heart of God, making Christ's presence effective in our neighbourhood. The work is carried out effectively in our families and communities when we respond to the deepest needs of the people under our care. Christ is dependent on you and me to be shepherds of his flock in a caring and loving service of others. We rise by lifting others up. We pray for courage, wisdom and patience to be good shepherds!