

Easter 4C

Listening to the Voice of the Good Shepherd

Every year on the fourth Sunday of Easter the church focuses our attention on Jesus the Good Shepherd. She reminds us that Jesus is the Good Shepherd who laid down his life for us. No one takes his life from him—not even those who nailed him to the cross. Jesus freely lays down his life and takes it up again in the resurrection from the dead. And so the Father loves the Son, because the Son freely lays down his life for our life so that he can raise us with him to new life.

There are many who claim to be good shepherds today. They come and call us to follow them. They come and promise us life. They come and present themselves as models for us to follow. But they are not good shepherds because they will not lay down their lives for us. Unlike the Good Shepherd, they are more concerned about themselves than they are about us. Unlike the Good Shepherd, they flee when danger comes. Unlike the Good Shepherd, they work for hire.

Only Jesus, the Good Shepherd, gives us eternal life, the fullness of life, because only Jesus has risen from the dead. Only Jesus holds the key to life and death. Only he can give us the very life of God, because only he has risen from the dead. This is why it is so important to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd and to respond to his call. This is why it is important to obey of the Good Shepherd when he calls so that he can lead us into the pastures of eternal life. But how can I hear the voice of the Good Shepherd when there are so many competing voices today? How do I know I am listening to the voice of the Good Shepherd and not to my own voice or the voice of another?

First, we hear the voice of the Good Shepherd every week when the Word of God is proclaimed at this Liturgy. Although it is we who proclaim the Word, the one who speaks is the risen Christ. The voice we hear is the voice of the Good Shepherd.

Second, we hear the voice of the Good Shepherd in the constant teaching of the church that has been proclaimed generation after generation. What has been taught and believed in the church by everyone everywhere is the voice of the Good Shepherd.

Third, we hear the voice of the Good Shepherd in the depth of our heart when we are at prayer. The Good Shepherd speaks to us in the sacred sanctuary of our conscience. To be sure, there are times when our voice overpowers the voice of the Good Shepherd. But if we enter into prayer faithfully and regularly, and if we form our conscience carefully, we will hear the voice of the Good Shepherd, the voice of the living Christ.

Finally, if we hope to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd, it is important that we judge and discern the voices we hear. Do not follow everyone who calls you. Rather, wait and listen for the voice of the Good Shepherd. If you hear a voice calling you to what is selfish and self-centered, it is not the voice of the Good Shepherd. If you hear a voice calling you to jealousy and envy, it is not the voice of the Good Shepherd. If you hear a voice calling you to be suspicious and envious of others, it is not the voice of the Good. The voice of the good shepherds calls us to a selfless love for each other. The voice of the Good Shepherd calls us to peace and reconciliation. The voice of the Good Shepherd calls us to live with each in the Spirit. Listen to that voice, heed that voice, obey that voice and all will be well.