

4th Sunday of Easter A

The sheep hear his voice

The Fourth Sunday of Easter is also called Good Shepherd Sunday. Every year the Gospel for this day is taken from the Good Shepherd discourse that we find in Chapter 10 of John's Gospel. We are reminded that Jesus cares for us as a shepherd cares for the sheep of his flock.

An interesting fact about sheep is that they have very poor eyesight. It is said they can see no further than about six feet, and then everything becomes blurry. Their hearing is however better, so voice recognition is very important for sheep. A lot of bleating goes on among them. And that is why there is a great emphasis in today's Gospel on the sheep hearing the voice of the shepherd. The sheep follow the shepherd "because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger because they do not know the voice of strangers."

We also need to recognise the voice of the Good Shepherd and to listen to him. And this is often not easy. There are many conflicting voices out there claiming to be the voice of the Good Shepherd but they are not. Social media is full of so called 'influencers' offering all sorts of advice. But they are not the voice of the Good Shepherd.

So how, amidst all the voices out there, can we recognise the true voice of the Good Shepherd? Well, for me, the Gospels are very important. The voice of Jesus, the Good Shepherd whom we meet in the Gospels, speaks of love for one other of forgiveness, of mercy, of care for the most oppressed, for the widow, the orphan, the refugee and the prisoner. If a person's words are consistent with those of Jesus in the Gospels, we can be confident that through that person we are hearing the voice of the Good Shepherd.

As Catholics, we believe that the Good Shepherd speaks to us in a special way through the Pope, the "Universal Shepherd" of the Church, who acts as a spiritual father, a visible source of unity, and the Vicar of Christ.

And Pope Leo XIV's voice has sounded out very strongly in recent days in the face of the terrible wars besieging our world. He has strongly rebuked world leaders for invoking the name of God to justify the killing thousands of innocent people: "Do not drag the holy name of God, the God of life, into discourses of death", he said.

He continued: “To world leaders we cry out: stop! It is time for peace! Sit at the table of dialogue and mediation – not at the table where rearmament is planned and deadly actions are decided.

“Enough of the idolatry of self and money! Enough of the display of power! Enough of war! True strength is shown in serving life,” he added.

The Pope then warned all of us not to think that this is a matter only for world leaders. There is a responsibility that falls to all of us: “Let us turn to a Kingdom of peace that is built up day by day—in our homes, schools, neighbourhoods, in civil and religious communities. A Kingdom that counters polemics and resignation through friendship and a culture of encounter. Let us believe once again in love, moderation and good politics. We must form ourselves and get personally involved, each following our own calling. Everyone has a place in the mosaic of peace!”

Sadly, there are those who have tried to drown out the voice of the Pope, or to ridicule or reject what he is saying. On this Good Shepherd Sunday, let us recognise the voice of the Good Shepherd in the words of Pope Leo. Let us take them to heart and do what we can to build up the mosaic of peace in our world.

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