

FR. JOHN'S HOMILY
4th Sunday of Easter, May 8, 2022

This Sunday we are called to pray for the Grace to Listen. It is a blessing when you have someone that really listens to you. That is one of the blessings I have received by many years of counseling; someone who listens deeply. Think about the way you listen to others. Many times I have to catch myself interjecting my thoughts; that is not listening. How many times when I am talking to people do they cut me off before I finish my thought? That is not listening. If we do this with each other, then we know it happens in our relationship with God. When is the last time you really listened to God?

Recently on retreat, praying with the Scriptures: Matthew 11: 27: *“All things have been handed over to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father and no one knows the Father except the Son and to anyone to whom the Son wished to reveal him.”* And in talking to the Lord, and asking a few questions, I heard the Lord say “Yes, you are one I wish to reveal the Father to, but I also realized God does with anyone who gives Him the time.” So, I waited for a while until I heard three words: Talk, Listen and Be. In contemplating these words, I knew what the Lord was saying to me: Talk less, Listen more, and Be Still. And I will know more about this relationship between the Father and the Son. It is so simple, yet so powerful. If in my or your prayer life with Jesus, we could practice this: talking less, listening more, and learning to be, then we can walk closer with the Lord.

I know it's hard for us to listen to the voice of the Lord. We are too busy and too distracted. As Matthew Kelly states in his books, we must learn to disengage in order to engage. Disengage from the world, and engage in the Mystery of God.

So this Sunday is known as Good Shepherd Sunday. We are called to listen to the voice of Jesus. Jesus is the Good Shepherd. Our Shepherd laid down His life for us, and He will only lead us to Goodness and Kindness all the days of our life.

During Jesus' time, He would have seen many shepherds with their sheep. I am sure in His travels Jesus would have seen many flocks grazing, and the shepherds leading them. He would have seen the shepherds caring for their flocks. And how the sheep always followed their shepherd. The shepherds kept them safe, guarded them, and led them to food and drink. Jesus often spoke about this relationship of the shepherds and the sheep, and compared the people at times like sheep without a shepherd.

The most dangerous time for the shepherds was the night. It was difficult for them to see their flocks in the dark. So in order to protect themselves and their flock, they would gather in a safe place, with other shepherds. Various flocks would arrive, along with their shepherds, and all these flocks were funneled into

the one sheepfold. This made for a rather large gathering, and there wasn't any practice of branding or marking in order to tell one from the other. And some enclosed structure, like the mountains, with rock walls would protect their flock, and the shepherds slept at the gate. The question is what would happen in the mornings when the flock all mixed and mingled together?

Remember the sheep know their shepherd's voice, the shepherd knows their flock. So each respective shepherd would call his sheep, and he would not even have to look back and his sheep would follow him. When he called out, they simply got to their feet and came with him, through the sheep-gate.

Jesus refers to this in the Gospel. "*My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they know me*". Someone who knows you by name and loves you? There is something very special about that type of relationship. A friend of mine who has known me for some time, remembers my Mother when she was younger. She will never forget hearing my Mom say my name for the first time; it was the first time she heard me called Johnny. She says that she heard my mother's love when she said my name. This is the type of special bond that God desires to have with us His people.

Jesus calls us by name with this type of love. A love that is unconditional and forever. He tell us that He loves us. We are safe in His arms. No harm will every come to us. "*You shall never perish*", He says, and Jesus is always true to His words. No one can snatch us out of His hand.

Do we recognize the voice of Jesus our Shepherd? I suspect many of us have a difficult time listening to His voice? Or when we receive the Eucharist, the Bread of Life, do we realize we are receiving the Good Shepherd? We are no stranger to Jesus but a member of His flock. We are well-fed and greatly cared for as His flock. Jesus our Good Shepherd is here; Listen to Him.

On this Good Shepherd Sunday, Jesus knows us as His people, His flock. Let us learn to listen to the voice of our Shepherd. The comforting message is that no one can snatch the sheep out of his Father's hands. The challenge is for us to really listen to the voice of Jesus, our Good shepherd. And for all of us to talk less, listen more, and learn to be part of Jesus' wonderful flock.