

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Year C: Acts 13:14, 43-52; Ps 100; Rev 7:9, 14b-17; Jn 10:27-30

May 8, 2022

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This Fourth Sunday of Easter is known in the Church as Good Shepherd Sunday, because we hear in the Gospel of St. John how Jesus described Himself as a shepherd who guides and protects the flock of His disciples. Jesus said, *“My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. No one can take them out of my hand.”*

This means we are supposed to think of ourselves as the sheep that belong to Christ and that follow Him, by living as He taught. In order to live as He taught, we need to listen for His voice. Jesus said, *“My sheep hear my voice; ... and they follow me.”* To hear the voice of Christ, we need to pay close attention to His words recorded in the Gospels and passed down by the Church. The Gospels should be the most sacred writings to us, because they record the voice of our Shepherd, the one who guides and protects us. And this is why it is recommended that every Christian should spend time reading the Gospels and reflecting on the words they record.

We know that the words of Christ sometimes console us and sometimes challenge us. They don't always leave us feeling comfortable, especially if we need to make changes in our life to live as Jesus taught. But all the words of Christ, whether comforting or challenging, should give us Christians a certain joy when we hear them, because we know they are the words of the Good Shepherd who gave His life to save us. In one of the forms of the Penitential Rite for Mass, we pray, “Lord Jesus, you have given us the consolation of the truth.” And that's why it should give us joy to hear the voice of Christ, the Good Shepherd, because we know His words are the truth about how we should live.

Jesus says that when we hear His voice and follow Him, He gives us eternal life. And in the second reading today, we hear a description of this eternal life from the Book of Revelation, written by the Apostle St. John: *“I, John, had a vision of a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people, and tongue. They stood before the throne and before the Lamb, wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands. ... [T]hey stand before God's throne and worship him day and night in his temple. ... For the Lamb who is in the center of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to springs of life-giving water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”* Heaven is

described for us as a great celebration of praise and worship of God, where there is rest and refreshment, and no more suffering or pain.

So, by following the voice of Jesus as recorded in the Gospel, we move toward this eternal celebration of praise and worship of God. And the Church teaches that we actually begin to participate in this heavenly gathering when we gather around the altar here at Mass. “In the earthly liturgy we take part in a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the holy city of Jerusalem toward which we journey as pilgrims, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God, ...; we sing a hymn to the Lord’s glory with all the warriors of the heavenly army; venerating the memory of the saints, we hope for some part and fellowship with them; we eagerly await the Saviour, Our Lord Jesus Christ, until He, our life, shall appear and we too will appear with Him in glory” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 8). In other words, here at Mass, in the earthly liturgy, we join the choirs of angels and saints in Heaven, praising and worshipping God.

And this is one reason why receiving Holy Communion at Mass is so important. Today, these boys and girls of our parish will receive Jesus in Holy Communion for the first time. When we come to Mass, we thank Jesus for what He did for us, and we praise Him for being our Savior and our Lord. We tell Him how much we love Him and how much we need His help. But we also receive Him in Holy Communion, as He wants us to do. And when we receive Jesus in Holy Communion, He comes to live in our souls, and He guides us and directs us to follow His teachings and to do the right thing. Holy Communion is how Jesus lives in us and steers and directs us as our Good Shepherd. If we are the sheep of Christ, then the Holy Eucharist is the food that Jesus feeds us to guide and protect us. Holy Communion really is “food from Heaven.” So, when we receive Holy Communion worthily, we are staying on the road to Heaven. Jesus said, “*My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. No one can take them out of my hand.*” And Holy Communion is how Jesus keeps us very close to Him throughout our lives.

Lastly, we have to recognize our mothers on this Mother’s Day. For so many Catholics, faith in Christ is passed down to them in a powerful way by their mothers. Mothers try to steer and guide their children, but Christian mothers know that Christ steers their children even better, and so they encourage their children to remain faithful to Christ. Christian mothers often rejoice to see their children follow Christ and believe in Him. For many of us, our mothers are God’s most powerful instrument in keeping us close to Him. And that’s just one of the many reasons we honor them on Mother’s Day, as we should on every day of the year.