

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER (2025 - C)

Our Lord Jesus Christ has many titles. For example, we call Him teacher and Lord (Jn 13:13). We call Him the Son of God and the Son of Man. We call Him King; we call Him the Lamb of God, and we call Him Savior. We also call Him the Good Shepherd.

In fact, Jesus calls Himself that. He said, **“I am the Good Shepherd ... I know my sheep and mine know me (Jn 10:14).”** In our holy gospel, Jesus also 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. My Father, who has given them to me is greater than all, and no one can take them out of the Father’s hand. The Father and I are one.”

To understand Jesus the Good Shepherd, let’s take a closer look at our gospel reading. In it, our Lord is speaking about His flock. Obviously these are not real sheep. Rather, Jesus is referring to His disciples, His followers. It is they who are His sheep and His flock.

So what can we say about His flock? What do we know about them? Well, Jesus said, **“My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me.”** When Jesus said this, He was using an image the people of His time knew quite well. Back then, shepherds were a common sight leading their flocks to green pastures and to water. Shepherds would walk before their sheep, and as they did so, they would talk or sing to them.

For their part, the sheep knew their shepherd, and when they heard his voice, when he called out to them, they would come. On the other hand, if someone else called to them, the sheep would not come because they did not recognize his voice.

Now when Jesus spoke these words, the people of His day literally heard them with their own ears, and they clearly understood the symbolism. They clearly understood that Jesus was talking to them and about them. They understood He was saying that they were His sheep and His flock. So, when they heard His voice, that is, when they heard His teachings, they listened very carefully and did their best to follow them.

But what about now? Does Jesus still have a flock? Does He still speak to His sheep? The answer is “Yes,” but with this difference. He no longer speaks directly, that is, with His own voice. Instead, now when He speaks to His flock, He speaks in different ways. He speaks to us through His creation. He speaks to us in our hearts. He speaks to us through Scripture and Sacred Tradition, and most importantly, He speaks to us through His Church.

So why not speak to us directly? Why not speak to us in person? Why doesn’t Jesus speak to us with His own voice as He did when He was here on Earth? The answer is because our Lord’s work on earth is complete. He has returned to His Father in heaven.

However, in no way does that mean He has abandoned His flock. Not at all. Since our Lord's Ascension into heaven and since the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, our Lord has spoken to us through His Church.

Our Lord's final command to His Apostles was that they go into the whole world and tell the good news. This was so that people everywhere could hear His words in the mouths of the Apostles. To help with this, the Holy Spirit gave the Apostles the gift of tongues so that people could understand them in their own languages.

Thirteen years ago, in the fall of 2012, I went to Rome for the canonization of Saint Kateri Tekekwitha. When I was there Pope Benedict gave a speech in Italian which I don't understand. However, after the Pope spoke, eight priests came forward, one after the other to give a summary of the Pope's talk in different languages so that people from all over the world could understand what the Pope said. These included English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, German, Arabic and Polish.

Through His Church, Jesus continues to speak to us about what we must do and believe. Through His Church we continue to hear the words of eternal life, that we are cared for so that we might not perish.

Recall here what Jesus said to Saint Peter, "You are Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church. Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven ... (Mt 16:19)." So the Church speaks with the voice of Christ. When we hear the Church, we are hearing Jesus.

Jesus also speaks to us through Scripture and Sacred Tradition. We hear His words from Scripture each time we attend holy Mass or when we read them at home or when meditate on them. Often, at just the right moment or time in our lives, a Scripture passage will speak to us with words of comfort or guidance or admonition or instruction.

Jesus speaks to us through our traditions as well. For example, when we celebrate the feast of Christmas, our hearts are moved with love as we consider the Christ Child and of how God came to us – not in power and might which would terrify us – but as a baby.

Now as we celebrate Easter, another tradition, we are reminded of how Jesus conquered sin and Satan and death. We are reminded of God's mercy, and we are reminded that those who believe in the Lord are blessed.

Jesus also speaks to us personally, not in words, but in our hearts. In prayer, we often gain insight into God's will. We are moved to do certain things that are beneficial to our spiritual life or to the spiritual lives of others. Often Jesus touches our hearts and we feel His presence and His love.

Finally, Jesus speaks to us through His creation. As the Psalm says, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands (19:1)." Who cannot look on God's creation and not hear the voice of the Lord?

So, in many different ways, we hear the voice of our Good Shepherd calling us to a deeper love of God and neighbor and leading us to eternal life.

So it's clear that Jesus still speaks to His flock. However, this raises another question: Who belongs to Christ's flock?

Going back to our gospel today, it's clear that to be a member of the Lord's flock, one must not only hear His voice, but one must also follow Him. So, it's not enough to listen to Jesus, we must also follow Him, and that is not always easy.

Lots of people have heard the voice of Jesus. They have heard the good shepherd call to them, but they hesitate to follow. Others once followed Him but have strayed and follow Him no longer. Still others simply refuse to follow and go their own way.

This is all very strange. If Jesus is going to lead us to green pastures, if Jesus is going to refresh our souls, then it makes sense to follow Him. In fact, if He is going to give us eternal life and to ensure that we never perish, what possible reason could there be to not follow Him?

Part of the reason is because many other voices are calling out to us today. They tempt us. They promise us things. They promise pleasures. They promise happiness. They promise to fulfill our every wish, but these are the words of false shepherds. They are also lies of the evil one. They are the words of the devil.

So how can we tell them apart? How can we know if we are hearing the voice of Jesus the good shepherd, or rather the voice of the evil one?

The answer is simple.

Listen to the Church. If what you are hearing in matters of faith or morals is different from what the Church teaches, it is a lie.

Listen to the Scriptures. If what you hear contradicts what you read, it is a lie.

Listen to the voice of Jesus in your heart. If what you hear leaves you uneasy around Jesus, or conflicted inside, or without joy and peace, it is a lie.

Do not listen to these lying voices. Do not answer their call. Do not follow them.

Instead, listen to Jesus our Good Shepherd. Listen to Him because His teachings are true. To be a member of Christ's flock, you must do both, listen to Him and follow Him. Do so and He will lead you eternal life, and you will not perish and no one will be able to take you from His hand. Amen.