

## His Sheep Know His Voice Easter 4C

A priest was teaching a Sunday school class about Psalm 100 and centered in on the verse, “We are his people and the sheep of his pasture.” He told the children about sheep, that they weren’t very smart and needed lots of guidance, and that a shepherd’s job was to stay close to the sheep, protect them from wild animals and keep them from wandering off and doing dumb things that would get them hurt or killed.

He pointed to the little children in the room and said that they were the sheep and needed lots of guidance. Then the priest put his hands out to the side, palms up in a dramatic gesture, and with raised eyebrows said to the children with a grin, “If you are the sheep then who is the shepherd?”

There was an awkward silence.

Then Jennie, a young second-grader, said, “Jesus: Jesus is the shepherd.”

The young priest, obviously caught by surprise, said to her, “Well, then, who am I?”

Jennie thought for a moment, and then said with a shrug, “I guess you must be the sheep dog.”

—Patrick T. Gray, [theadvent.org/sermons/pg050706.htm](http://theadvent.org/sermons/pg050706.htm). Retrieved October 17, 2006 for HomileticsOnline.

I am grateful to be sheep dog in Jesus flock. As the sheep dog to Jesus the shepherd I too must listen to his voice. I can hear him call but to be obedient and follow him I must listen to his voice. The sheep, the sheep dog and the shepherd walk together so they may work together.

Who is this shepherd who leads the sheep?

- He is someone who leads by example. The works Jesus speaks of tells us that he serves and answers to God. The nature of his good deeds leads his sheep to believe him and trust him. Sheep are dumb animals. They need to trust with their hearts rather than with their understanding.
- He is someone whose “sheep” hear his voice. In biblical times, shepherds had shrill yells that would resound through the wadis and across the hills where their sheep grazed. The Shepherd’s voice was firm, clear, loud — and there was no mistaking it. It told the sheep, “I am your shepherd. I know the best path. Follow me.”
- He is someone who knows the sheep. He has an intimate relationship with those he leads. He spends time with both his disciples and the villages where the sheep live. In any organization those you lead had better know you if they are to give back what you ask.
- He is someone who gives to his followers eternal life. That is why they call him the Great Shepherd of the sheep. And everyday he leads his followers to still waters, to green pastures and restores their souls.
- He is someone who protects and defends his “sheep,” because “no one will snatch them out of my hand.” This security is not earthly. Sheep may lose their life, their financial comfort and their social acceptance because of their faith. His Spirit is like a soldier on guard duty, that keeps the heart and mind centered on Christ.
- He is someone who is one with the “Father.” He is unified in every way with God. His solidarity with God reassures dumb sheep that they follow the true shepherd unless they doubt and wander away to false gods.

How do the sheep hear the shepherd’s voice?

Is it like Moses who heard from God audibly at Sinai? Is it like Elijah who heard the sound of sheer silence as God spoke? Or is it like one pastor describing his call: “I heard a voice — not an audible, loud,

human kind of voice — but inner words spoken somewhere in my soul that were very clear and very concise. What I heard was ‘Teach this book, and I will take care of everything else.’”

Don’t we all long for a voice like those three experienced?

Perhaps we would be better off to ask ourselves, “How does one know the voice of the Shepherd, so that we can be obedient and follow?”

Voice recognition is a matter of training. Once trained we can refuse to listen or we listen selectively.

When is the last time we have sensed God leading us to still waters and green pastures? When have we been asked to follow Jesus even when it is costly? Sheep *regularly* hear from their shepherd, they trust his voice and they follow.

Perhaps the sheep dogs need better training. They need to better keep the sheep pointed to the Great Shepherd. All we like sheep must stay connected in daily prayer and tune in to that voice that gently calls us, bidding us come, longing to lead us in our journey.

Let us pray:

Holy and faithful Shepherd, train us to hear your voice. And when we have at last heard and know it is you, may we with gladness follow you in the valley and on the mountain and on the sea shore. We thank you for your love. We give you our life as you gave us yours. Amen