

Voices

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The Fourth Sunday of Easter always includes the gospel reading of the “Good Shepherd.” In the Office of Readings portion of the Divine Office, we see a lengthy dissertation on what it is to be a good shepherd versus an evil one. St. Augustine’s work is certainly worthy of being read by everyone, and taken to heart, but you’ll have to do that on your own. I would like to concentrate on just one short line of the gospel passage from John, “*My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me*” (Jn. 10:27) Jesus is chiding the Pharisees for their stubborn refusal to believe in Him as the Son of God. They can’t hear Him, recognize His voice because they don’t belong to His flock. (Jn. 10: 25,26) So, we who do belong, we who are baptized, do we hear His voice and follow Him?

After working over 30 years in the construction industry as an electrician, I have significant hearing loss in both ears. The biggest reason beyond procrastination that I don’t have hearing aids is that I haven’t met anyone yet who was really satisfied with theirs. Anyways, because of my hearing loss, if I am in a room with a lot of people talking, I have an impossible time making sense of anything that is being said. This is even true for the people who are talking directly to me. I just can’t hear because of the din of noise. I have to really focus my attention and read lips as much as listen. My point here is that while most people don’t work in construction, in an environment of high decibel noise levels, we still have an impediment to hearing caused by the many conflicting “voices” blasting away for our attention. It is difficult to hear the voice of the Lord above the din of the world.

This is probably not as prevalent in our particular cluster, we are a bit more conservative than some other churches in the Archdiocese and the world, but I believe that in *every* church community, there is a significant number of “faithful believers” who think that issues of abortion, stem cell research and homosexuality, etc. are unimportant or exaggerated in Church teachings. I have heard many Catholics argue in defense of the woman’s right to choose – it’s her body after all – whether or not to have an abortion. I have heard Catholic men and women argue that the benefits of the stem cell research far outweighs concerns about the origin of the stem cell and that homosexuality is a genetic reality and not a sexual disorder. Pick any issue, and it is not difficult to find someone taking up the world’s secular opinion that *morality doesn’t really matter*. What I don’t hear too often, is someone correctly presenting the real teachings of the Church in defense of life and the sacredness of marriage and the safety of human society in a moral order. The voice of truth seems to be lost in the howling gale of worldly humanism, secularism and rationalism. Yet, if we care to listen, we can hear the Shepherds voice calling, “Come follow me.”

The voice is the Church, its doctrines and traditions. I’m not speaking of any individual bishop, priest, deacon or other; I’m using the model of Church as the Apostolic Teaching Authority, the rightful deposit of truth about God and God’s plan for human salvation. Still, hearing what is said is only part of the difficulty, a small part. Most important is for one to understand the meaning of what is being said. I believe that it is most important that we understand that there is a difference between knowing by rote and knowing through understanding and insight. The Church has struggled through the centuries, not stumbled through, to bring us to where we are today. If we don’t seek understanding and knowledge of that struggle, but instead fixate on an era of Church history, we really aren’t listening to the voice of the shepherd either. I believe that we should consider that the apostles heard the words and instructions from Jesus quite clearly, but it wasn’t until after the resurrection that they began to understand their meanings. A voice without meaning is only noise! Jesus says, “Come, follow me.”