

## FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER (C)

John 10:27-30  
April 25, 2010

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In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.  
Alleluia! Christ is risen! **He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

A new kind of aircraft was on its maiden flight. It was full of reporters and journalists, and a little while after takeoff, a voice was heard over the speakers. *“Ladies and gentlemen, I’m delighted to speak to you on this plane’s historic first flight. I can tell you the flight is going well. Nevertheless, I have to tell you about a minor inconvenience that has occurred. The passengers on the right side can, if they look out their window, see that the closest engine is vibrating slightly. This shouldn’t worry you, because this plane is equipped with four engines and we are flying along smoothly at an acceptable altitude.*

*As long as you are looking out the right side, you might as well look at the other engine as well. You will notice that it is glowing, or more precisely one should say, burning. That shouldn’t worry you either, since this plane is designed to fly with just two engines if necessary, and we are maintaining an acceptable altitude and speed.*

*As long as we are looking out the plane, those of you on the left side shouldn’t worry, if you look and notice that one of the left engines is missing. It fell off about ten minutes ago. Let me tell you that we are amazed that the plane is doing so well without it.*

*However, I will call your attention to something a little more serious. Along the center aisle — all the way down the plane — a crack has appeared. Some of you are, I suppose, able to look through the crack and may even notice the waves of the ocean below. In fact, those of you with very good eyesight may be able to notice a small lifeboat that was thrown from the plane. Well, ladies and gentlemen, you will be happy to know that your captain is keeping an eye on the progress of the plane from that lifeboat below.”*

Sometimes we find ourselves in situations very similar to that plane flight. Everything around us seems to be falling apart, and the person in charge seems to be as remote as the captain in the raft on the ocean far below.

But the Good News is that the One in charge of our lives is **not remote**. He is our Good Shepherd and he is leading the way. Leading you; giving you eternal life; assuring you we will never perish; and that no one can snatch you out of his hands.

Just a bit before today’s Gospel, Jesus declared: *“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep”* (Jn 10:11). Jesus had warned his hearers against the **false** shepherds, the hirelings who are thinking only of their own profit, and who are indifferent to the welfare of the flock. We do well to heed those words, and be aware that there are indeed **false shepherds**. There are those

who would lead God's flock astray.

So the logical question is "How can the flock know who is the good shepherd and who is the bad one?" Jesus, as he so often does, refers to the everyday experience of his listeners. A few verses prior to today's Gospel, Jesus declared, "*When [the shepherd] has brought out [from the fold] all his own [sheep], he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, **for they know his voice**. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of a stranger*" (Jn 10:4-5).

So it is by his voice that they know him. The sound of the Good Shepherd's voice is the sign for the sheep that they can trust him. He knows them, and they know him.

What then is Jesus trying to say through this teaching? Well, the primary thing seems to simply be, that **he knows his sheep**. He knows me better than I know myself. He knows you better than you know yourself.

He knows me, not just a little bit, but through and through — good and bad. God alone knows what is really in a person's heart. The Church has long confessed and taught that God is omniscient — all-knowing. But this is not a teaching to strike fear in us. God is not the oppressive "Big Brother," the great watcher who sees all, spying into your ultimate intimacies, the one from whom you cannot keep the least little corner hidden.

God *is* all knowing, but he knows you **as the shepherd knows his sheep**. Which is to say, it is a knowing grounded in *love*. He knows what we need, and he means to lead his flock to good pastures. "*I give you eternal life,*" says Jesus. He does not know us in order to condemn us. No, but in order **to lead us safely to the pastures of eternal life**. Just as the Good Shepherd fights for the life of his sheep and protects them from predators, so Jesus declares emphatically, "*They shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand.*"

Do not be frightened by God's omniscience — his deep knowledge of you. It is inseparable from his mercy. It is comforting to know that nothing is hidden from God, for again his purpose is **not** to condemn.

And yet there are so many voices that would condemn! We are continually criticizing one another, and we are tempted to regularly find fault with the **other** person — there is always a fly in **his** ointment, always a speck in **her** eye. And then there is always that voice in my heart, accusing me: "*You ought to have done that differently! You should have done better!*" Self-criticism and self-reproaches — sometimes, unfortunately, well founded — can so easily be twisted into a denial of the Gospel, a denial of God's own gracious promise to us.

But again, there is a voice that sounds different. "*My sheep hear my voice.*" This voice does you **good**. This voice does not condemn you — neither does it butter you up. This voice tells you the truth, yet it is full of **love** and **kindness**, and **mercy**. This is Christ's voice, the voice of the Good Shepherd.

This voice speaks through the scriptures. This voice speaks through the Sacraments. This voice speaks through the liturgy and communal prayers. This voice speaks through the community of Christ's people. Discerning the Shepherd's voice among all the other voices, and all the other noise, and the other voices is of vital importance. For he whose voice this is, is leading you along a good path. You can trust this voice completely. It is leading you on the path to life.

Bishop Bo Giertz from Sweden wrote these words in a meditation on Christ the Good Shepherd:

*The truth that Christ is the good shepherd  
is bound together with his resurrection.  
Because God has "brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus,  
the great shepherd of the sheep,"  
he has become the shepherd of all.  
God has raised his servant from the dead  
and has sent him to bless us.*

*And now the shepherd is abroad in the world  
and is seeking the lost sheep.  
He has compassion upon the crowds in the streets,  
the people in the business world,  
the crowd seeking entertainment and amusement,  
for he sees them as "harassed and helpless  
like sheep without a shepherd."  
He seeks to gather them all together  
that there may be one fold and one shepherd...*

*But how does this happen?  
For many all this is only an empty set of phrases.  
And this is not strange.  
All their lives they keep themselves out of reach  
of the good shepherd's hands.  
They have not understood that the invisible Savior  
has created for himself a visible church.  
This church is his tool, his voice, and his hands.*

Christ is the Good Shepherd — the invisible Savior has created for himself a visible church. This church is his tool, his voice, and his hands. So now, we must pray for the strength, and the courage, and the energy to be about the work of the Good Shepherd. Jesus is working to gather his flock, but many do not know that they belong to him. Many do not know that he is calling them. Too many do not know the joy and the peace of recognizing the voice of the Good Shepherd.

So we must share this good news with them. We must invite and encourage.  
And invite and encourage again!

Alleluia! Christ is risen! ***He is risen indeed! Alleluia!***

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