

Fourth Sunday of Easter - C

The Fourth Sunday of Easter is also known as Good Shepherd Sunday. It marks a turning point in the Easter season, because as of this Sunday stories about Jesus' resurrection appearances give way to readings about who the risen Lord is in our lives.

The image of the Good Shepherd is a powerful one, and one which provides a lot of different aspects to ponder: the one who comes looking for us, the one who lays down his life for us, and today, the one who calls to us to follow him.

How do we hear the voice of the Good Shepherd? Many of us were trained to at an early age. We became accustomed to the voices of our parents, who also had been trained by their parents to follow the Lord.

As we grow older we may realize that our parents' voices and the voice of the Lord are not exactly the same. Our parents may have had blind spots, areas in their life where they had become deaf to God's call. Sin will do that.

Fr. Ron Rolheiser, an important spiritual writer in contemporary Christianity, reflected on the experience of learning to hear the Good Shepherd's voice as he grew up in a devout Catholic home.

Over time he came to realize that for all the good he had received from his mother and father, the voice with which they spoke the faith to him was a bit more fearful and suspicious of the world than was called for.

As he grew into an adult Catholic Christian he learned to hear the voice of the Lord with greater clarity and was able to pick out more easily where the voice of his parents was out of tune.

That's a task we all have to undergo—not only for the sake of our own growth in understanding of the meaning of the Gospel but also because, whether we like it or not, ours is the voice by which some people are hearing the Good News.

This should not be all that surprising to us. It's the natural way that a tradition is handed on. But we have to be aware of it, accept it as a fact, and take it seriously.

It seems to me that this is one of the primary challenges of the Christian faith, and one that the majority of us shy away from.

Rather than embrace the task of being a witness to the faith, we can easily fall back and say to ourselves, "That's Father's job" or "I don't know enough" or "I'll let my actions do the talking for me."

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Many of us have yet to find our voice as mature Christians and proclaimers of the Gospel.

Can I just briefly respond to the three objections I listed?

1. It's true, it is Father's job. The problem with the first objection is that it is not just Father's job. I can't be everywhere, can't engage everyone in conversation. In fact, some people avoid me like the plague. In those cases, another member of the faithful will have to be the mouthpiece.

Second objection: "I don't know enough." True again. But don't let that stop you. Who of us knows all we need to know about the faith. That's not how the mystery of salvation works. We go with what we do know and are willing to revise what we say when deeper insight makes that necessary.

Third objection: True again! We all know that actions speak louder than words. But what speaks loudest of all is when our actions and our words go together.

Sometimes our actions can be ambiguous. People don't really get what we are up to or what motivates us to do what we do. That's where the words come in. They clarify. Alone they cannot carry the day. We must act, too, but words contribute a lot to getting the message across.

This is one of the fundamental tasks of an adult appropriation of the faith—that we would find our own voice in spreading the Good News, not worrying too much whether we have it all right or not, but to get in there and pitch, trusting that time and the grace of God will sort it all out.