

## REFLECTIONS FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER ~ 08 May 2022

### The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale

Mother's Day, the World Day of Prayer for Vocations, and the Fourth Sunday of Easter – this day carries with it many reasons to rejoice as our Psalm 100 says so beautifully, “Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come into God’s presence with singing” (Ps 100:1-2). Let us reflect on two themes which permeate today’s readings – the first is listening to the voice of our God, and the second is the image of Jesus the Christ as both shepherd and lamb.

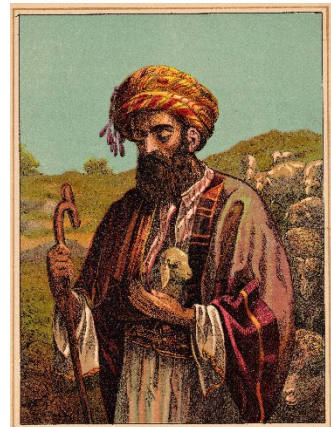


Five times in chapter 10 of John’s Gospel in which Jesus uses the image of the shepherd to describe himself, we hear the word “voice” – they hear, they listen, they know the voice of the shepherd. Knowing his voice, they realize that Jesus knows them, and they choose to follow him, “My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me” (Jn 10:27). We have heard this reading so many times that we take it for granted. But let us take a moment this morning to understand more deeply what this simple image really means.

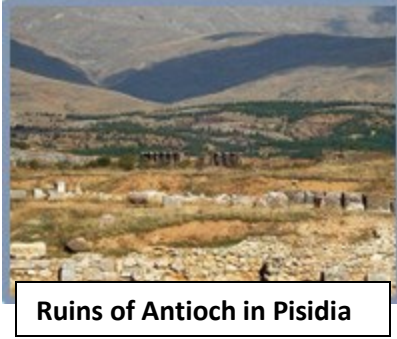
Think about when you were a child and frightened by something, maybe the dark or a strange noise or a cut on your hand. What voice did you hear, and you knew right away that everything would be okay? Think of a time when you were a young adult and things were not going well.

Again, what voice would you need to hear to be certain that all would be well? And just a day last week, think about a moment when you were feeling discouraged or anxious, what voice helped you find your balance again? Think of a time recently when you have good news to share – who was the first person you wanted to tell you how delighted they were for your good fortune. Voices that bring us comfort and hope and certainty really matter. They are signs for us of someone who cares for us, the one to whom we can turn when we need support or need to share our joy, the one who does so without judging us or finding fault with us.

Now go back to our Gospel reading. When and how do you hear God’s voice, the voice of Jesus, or the voice of the Spirit in your life? When you realized your life’s vocation, how did you hear God speak to you? When you began your first ministry, how did God’s voice resonate in your heart? What does God’s voice sound like when you are happy or when you are sad or when you are discouraged? “My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me.” Jesus goes even further. He repeats three times in the very short reading today, “they will never perish. . . no one will snatch them out of my hand. . .no one can snatch it out of the Father’s hand” (Jn 10:28, 29). Nothing will ever separate us from the love of God.



In the story from Acts, as Paul and Barnabas bring the good news to the people of Antioch in Pisidia, the people first hear their voice and follow them but later turn away. That refusal to truly listen to their voices leads Paul and Barnabas to begin teaching the good news to the Gentiles. They find the support to do so in God’s voice in Isaiah, “I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, so that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth” (Is 49:6) which Paul quotes. These words are echoed in God’s voice in Is 42:6, Ps. 22:27, and Ps 67:2.



Ruins of Antioch in Pisidia

The image of Jesus as shepherd is balanced by the image of Jesus as lamb in our reading this morning from the book of Revelation. The image of Jesus as lamb is also used in the first chapter of John's Gospel, when John the Baptist points our Jesus as the Lamb of God. The image is used throughout the Acts of the Apostles and the letters, often referring to the image of the paschal lamb from the Exodus story in the Old Testament. Jesus as "the Lamb" who was slaughtered is explored in detail in the book of Revelation.

In today's reading from Revelation, "a great multitude, people from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages" (Rev 7:14) stand before the Lamb who is clothed in white – they are also clothed in white since their robes have been washed in the blood of the Lamb. They are sheltered by the Lamb, they will not hunger or thirst or be made weak in the strong heat of the day, for "the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd and bring them to springs of water for life" (Rev 7:17) – the latter an echo of Psalm 23.



*The Great Multitude, Artist Unknown*

There are so many apparent contradictions in this short passage from Revelation – blood has washed robes and made them white, the shepherd becomes the lamb who becomes once again the shepherd, a shepherd sits on the throne of heaven, a great multitude of people from every nation and every language have grown from the small band of Jewish disciples of Jesus. The contradictions are signs to us that our God is a God of surprises. How can blood make something white? Lambs are the weakest and most vulnerable of animals, and shepherds are the least powerful persons in any society. Yet our whole religious tradition has its roots in the Old Testament in a small group of people descended from the slaves of Egypt and in the New Testament in a man born in a stable who ate with prostitutes and sinners and counted lowly fishermen among his friends.

There is a little prayer from Catherine of Siena which links multiple images of Jesus as the gatekeeper, Lamb, and gardener:

O gentle gatekeeper!  
O humble Lamb!  
You are the gardener,  
And once you have opened the gate of the heavenly garden,  
paradise,  
you offer us the flowers  
and the fruits of the eternal Godhead.

Thus, we find our reasons for joy this morning. Gaudete Sunday, the third Sunday of Advent, was a day of rejoicing because the promise of the coming of the Saviour was about to be fulfilled. Laetare Sunday, the fourth Sunday in Lent, brought the promise of the resurrection of Jesus after his suffering and death. Now, on this fourth Sunday of Easter, we with all Earth make joyful noise to our God, coming into God's presence with singing – using our voices to say thank you to a God who made us and whose steadfast love endures forever. The good Shepherd of John's Gospel is the incarnation of the Lord who is called good in Psalm 100. How blessed we are to be among the multitude from many lands and languages who know the voice of our God and follow the Way! The last words of the reading from Revelation have special meaning for those among us who are suffering physical or emotional pain or illness at this time in our lives, "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes" (Rev 7:17).



On this Mother's Day, we thank God for all our mothers and all our beloved aunts, sisters, nieces, and grandnieces who are mothers. The voices of our mothers are certainly among those who brought us the security of comfort and support and love. This is our blessing for them in the words of the spiritual writer, [Jan Richardson](#):

For Mothers  
Who are our first sanctuary.  
Who fashion a space of blessing with their own being:  
with the belly, the bone and the blood  
or, if not with these, then with the durable heart  
that offers itself to break and grow wide,  
to gather itself around another as refuge, as home.  
Who lean into the wonder and terror of loving what  
they can hold but cannot contain.  
Who remain in some part of themselves always awake,  
a corner of consciousness keeping perpetual vigil.  
Who know that the story is what endures, is what binds us,  
is what runs deeper even than blood  
and so they spin them in celebration of what abides  
and benediction on what remains:  
a simple gladness that latches onto us  
and graces us on our way.

On this Mother's Day, let us see the faces and hear the voices of the mothers whom we know and love!