

**Homily – Jn. 10: 27-30**  
**4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter - 7<sup>th</sup> May 2022**

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Years ago, the great actor Richard Burton was given a grand reception in his childhood parish. While replying to the complimentary speeches in the parish auditorium he asked if there was anything, they specially wanted to hear from him. After a minute's pause his old pastor asked him if he could recite the Good Shepherd Psalm (Psalm 23), which he had taught Burton in his Sunday school. A strange look came over the actor's face. He paused for a moment, and then said, "I will, on one condition—that after I have recited it, you, my pastor and teacher will do the same."

"I," said the old, retired priest, "am not an actor, but, if you wish that way, I shall do so." Impressively the actor began the Psalm. His voice and intonation were perfect. He held his audience spellbound, and, as he finished, a great burst of applause broke from the audience. As it died away, the old priest rose slowly from his wheelchair and began to recite the same Psalm prayerfully. His voice was feeble and shivering and his tone was not faultless. But, there was pin drop silence in the auditorium and when he finished, there was not a dry eye in the room. The actor rose and his voice quivered as he said, "Ladies and gentlemen, I reached your eyes and ears, but my old

pastor has reached your hearts. The difference is just this: I know the Psalm, but he knows the Shepherd."

We are on the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter known as the Good Shepherd Sunday. And it is also 'the World Day of Prayer for vocations'. The Scripture lessons for this day concern the role of the shepherds of God's flock in the Church. Each year on this Sunday, we reflect on the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd who kindly takes care of His flock. Now, a shepherd as we know, leads, feeds, nurtures, comforts, corrects, and protects his flock—responsibilities that belong to every Church leader and in a way every member of this faith community. And I suppose Jesus invites each of us today to know Him by experiencing Him and thus becoming good shepherds to those entrusted to our care.

Well! While trying to make some reflections on this Good Shepherd Sunday, my memories took me back to my school days where I remember having learnt a lovely poem on Fr. Peter Gilligan by W.B. Yeats. The Ballad of Father Gilligan by Yeats tells the story of a priest who has to visit an old man that is dying. The priest is struggling to know how to offer hope to the man and his family. The priest falls asleep on his chair and to his surprise, when he wakes up, he realizes that God has sent down an angel to watch over the old man as he dies, and

so ensures that his soul will go to heaven. This story has always struck me whenever I think of Jesus the Good Shepherd. Well! Here in this story, God showed mercy on both a tired old priest and a man at the moment of his death. And this is the assurance that we have from Jesus the Good Shepherd; that He walks with us all our way and He never lets us down in our lives.

Now, coming to the Gospel of the day from the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter of John, we see that it is very short, but very powerful. And herein, Jesus says: My sheep hear my voice. And I know them and they follow me. And Jesus would say that the sheep that are in the flock of the Good Shepherd do not follow strangers because they don't recognize the voice of strangers.

Well! Here, there is a promise and a challenge. The promise is this: That Jesus promises to speak to us. Christ did not rise from the dead just to abandon us or to go far away from us. Our Shepherd knows how easily we can become lost. And so, His voice is at work in our world today. If we listen to Him and follow Him, then our lives here on earth will have direction, will have a purpose and we will live forever. That is the promise.

And the challenge is this: There are imitators, deceivers; deceivers out there that try to take the place of the Master. There are many voices in our world clamouring for our attention and extending empty promises to us.

And we've got to discern the difference between the authentic voice of the Lord and all the other imitations out there.

Well! In the Scriptures we see that God speaks to His people on a regular basis. But at times, we fail to put ourselves in a situation where we can hear or even really believe that God speaks to us. But the truth remains that not only can we speak to God, but He created you and me in such a way that we can actually hear His voice. And so, the question is this: Do we recognize the voice of God? Do we know what the voice of God sounds like? He wants us to listen to Him, follow Him and walk in His perfect will.

Well, dear brothers and sisters, if we are the sheep who belong to Jesus the Good Shepherd, we would then listen to His voice, nurture a close relationship with Him and follow Him. And following Him means embracing what He stood and lived for: love of God and love of neighbor. Following the footsteps of the Good Shepherd means giving up our life of comfort and becoming a comforting presence for those who are in need. God bless you all, **Amen.**

