



HOMILY — FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Father Ralph Wright, O.S.B.

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
In verdant pastures he gives me repose;
beside restful waters he leads me;
he refreshes my soul.

He guides me in right paths
for his name's sake.
Even though I walk in the dark valley
I fear no evil; for you are at my side.
With your rod and your staff
that give me courage.¹

These words from the beloved Twenty-third Psalm provide the ideal complement to those words spoken by Our Lord in today's Gospel. Listen again to these words given to us by Saint John which were read to us a few moments ago, "[W]hoever enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. . . [T]he sheep hear his voice, as the shepherd calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. . . [H]e walks ahead of them, and the sheep follow him, because they recognize his voice."²

With these words in mind, I am moved to ask, "When you hear the voice of the Good Shepherd calling you by name, do you recognize His voice?" Of course, you do. It would be a rare person, indeed, who could not realize that it was the Lord who was calling them to follow Him.

And yet, I have a second question to ask: "When you hear the voice of the Good Shepherd calling you by name, do you follow Him without delay as He leads you out into green pastures?" Yes? Maybe? Always? Sometimes? Please God that no one within the sound of my voice would answer never?

I will grant you that because of our weak human nature, we may not always recognize His voice calling us by name. I will grant you that because of our weak human nature that it is not always easy to follow the voice of the Good Shepherd when He calls out to us to follow Him. But I will tell you — or rather I will remind you of something which we already know — we know and believe that the Good Shepherd never ceases calling us by name nor does He cease calling us to follow Him out into the green pastures of eternal life and blessing.

Though every time we gather to celebrate the Eucharist we are reminded of the great gift of Christ's loving sacrifice upon the cross, Easter is the time of year when we especially meditate upon this great gift given to us through our Lord's death and resurrection. In our second reading today, Saint Peter teaches us that "If you are patient

¹ Psalm 23:1-4

² John 10:2, 3b, 4b



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when you suffer for doing what is good, this is a grace before God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his footsteps. . . He himself bore our sins in his body upon the cross, so that, free from sin, we might live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you had gone astray like sheep, but you have now returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.”³

Each day is a new opportunity for us to respond to the voice of the Good Shepherd. It is no secret that for most of us we respond imperfectly to this voice. But it is also no secret, that in spite of our failings — our sins — the Good Shepherd still calls us to follow Him out of the love which He has for each and every single one of us, regardless of who we are. Yes, each day is a new opportunity for us to turn back to God out of love because of the love shown for us in the power of the Holy Spirit through His beloved Son, Jesus Christ.

On this the Fourth Sunday of Easter — the Sunday which we affectionately refer to as Good Shepherd Sunday — on this day we are invited to place ourselves in the sandals of those gathered listening to Saint Peter’s first sermon as we heard in our first reading today. Like them, having heard the Good News proclaimed — having heard the voice of the Good Shepherd calling to us to follow Him, we are moved to ask ourselves and to ask our God, “What are we to do?”

Perhaps one answer is contained in the teaching of Blessed John Henry Newman. Listen now to an excerpt from a sermon given by Cardinal Newman who encourages us to respond wholeheartedly, with the help of God’s grace, to the voice of the Good Shepherd calling us to follow Him into those green pastures of eternal life and blessing.

“ . . . , we say every day: ‘We are his people, the sheep of his flock.’ We also say: ‘We are lost, we have strayed far from your ways, like lost sheep’; never forgetting that on the one hand we are sinners, while on the other hand Christ is our guide and our guardian. He is the ‘way and the truth and the life’ (John 14:6). He is a light for our road, a lantern for our paths. He is our shepherd, and the sheep know his voice. If we are his sheep, we will listen to him, recognizing and obeying him. Let us be sure to follow when he goes before us; ‘He walks ahead of them, and the sheep follow him, because they recognize his voice.’ Let us not receive his grace in vain. When God called Samuel, he responded: ‘Speak, for your servant is listening’ (1 Sam 3:10). When Christ called him, St. Paul ‘was not disobedient to the heavenly vision’ (Acts 26:19). May we long to hear his voice; let us pray that he may give us attentive ears and a heart of goodwill.”⁴

³ I Peter 2:20b-21, 24-25

⁴ John Henry Newman (1801-90), *Douze sermons sur loe Christ*, trans. P. Leyris, (Paris: Eglolf, 1943) 54.