

4th Sunday Easter Year "A" 2020
May 2-3, 2020 Cathedral of Saint Paul
Readings: Acts 2:14, 36-41; 1Peter 2:20-25; John 10:1-10

They will not follow a stranger.

It is most appropriate to reflect on the role of the Good Shepherd in today's Gospel. Sound leadership is a critical aspect of today's Gospel. The account centers on the qualities of the Good Shepherd, yet another aspect of the story concerns the thieves and robbers. They are often forgotten in this account. What about the antagonist of the Shepherd?

Even today there are many who try to enter into the gate of the sheepfold, but only to steal away the sheep through their false teachings, banking on the good faith and naivete of the people. This is why it is indispensable to have the Magisterium, the central teaching authority in the Church that guides and directs, but also assures us. "They will not follow a stranger."

The account of the Good Shepherd places emphasis on the voice of the shepherd. This is not merely an image; this is fact. Those who shepherd sheep for a living will still tell you that if someone comes and speaks to the sheep, the animals simply will not leave the gated area. They only recognize the voice of the shepherd. Today's Gospel challenges those of us with leadership positions in the Church to a more authentic witness.

I was so hearted by our shepherds on Saturday afternoon, who visited five Catholic Senior Centers in succession, across the Twin Cities. They stopped to pray a decade of the Rosary at each and offer special prayers for the sick and elderly. Hundreds followed along live as did I on Facebook live. It was a beautiful sign of their closeness to those in our midst who are most vulnerable.

This entails listening. We all have heard the cries of the faithful who want the sacraments, who desire the fullness of the Gospel message preached, whether in season or out. We minister to a wide variety of people, some of whom believe that our local bishop or even the Pope is mistaken about this or that issue and who disregard the directives of the Church. A few

may even express their disappointment with us in our leadership. This Gospel serves as a powerful reminder of the challenges of ministry.

But if we all keep our focus on Jesus, the Good Shepherd, we will avoid the bulk of disputes that, rather than building up the Body of Christ, harm it. One of the few fruits of these past weeks has been more time for prayer and listening. May is the month of Mary and most assuredly, she listens to our pleas, our prayers, and yes, even our frustrations and fears.

Permit me to share a story in this regard. In 2009, a woman named Lacy Dodd wrote an article detailing her experience as a senior in college at University of Notre Dame. She went to a clinic for a test, to discover that indeed she was pregnant. Her life changed in an instant. She recalled:

“When I returned to campus, I ran to the Grotto. I was confused and full of conflicting emotions. But I knew this: No amount of shame or embarrassment would ever lead me to get rid of my baby. Of all women, Our Lady could surely feel pity for an unplanned pregnancy. I recalled her surrendered love to God’s invitation to become the home of the Incarnate Word. “Let it be done to me according to thy word,” she had said. In my hour of need, on my knees, I asked Mary for courage and strength. And she did not disappoint.”¹

Still, her boyfriend, also a ND student, pressured her to go Chicago for an abortion. She refused, and he said, “But I am pro-choice...abortion is just dining room talk.” She replied, “My choice is for life.” “And I learned, as so many pregnant women have before and since, that life is the one choice that pro-choicers won’t support.” She gave birth, and named the baby, Mary.²

The Blessed Mother rescued an undergrad twenty years ago with her maternal care, and truth triumphed over rhetoric, so that one couple’s decision against

¹ First Things, a Journal of Religion and Public Life, May 2009.

² The piece ended with a question to the UND administration: “Who draws support from your decision to honor President Obama—the young, pregnant Notre Dame woman sitting in that graduating class who wants desperately to keep her baby, or the Notre Dame man who believes that the Catholic teaching on the intrinsic evil of abortion is just dining-room talk?”

God's moral law was not worsened into a tragic decision against human life. Lacy's Catholic faith came through, and with Mary's assistance, she chose life.

In this month dedicated to Mary, let us implore her to guide and guard our own decisions, to watch over our precious young people in their difficult decisions and to give all of us the courage to stand clear with our convictions. May the Blessed Mother protect our families. *Sancta Maria, ora pro nobis.*