



THE ARCHDIOCESE of BIRMINGHAM

Ethnic Chaplaincies

4th Week of Easter: 8th/9th May 2022

Reflection / Homily – Mgr Daniel McHugh

“Teach me still thy voice to hear.”

Whenever you go to Mass or visit a Church, you find someone sitting or kneeling quietly in prayer. I remember a woman saying to me years ago: “I love Sunday morning Mass; it is a moment in the week when I get away from all the noise, and busyness just to be with God. I come away refreshed.” I remember her words particularly because I thought “Mass can be a fairly noisy place; you’re great to be able to focus on the things of God in spite of all the activity.”

Choosing a hymn for the Fourth Week of Easter and focusing especially on the Scripture readings for the Fourth Sunday I came upon “Loving Shepherd of thy sheep” and hit upon these words there “teach me still thy voice to hear.” Sometimes a friend has said to me “you are not listening to what I’m saying.” So, I respond “it is not only on the BBC that you hear interviewers not listening to what the interviewees are saying.” But I hear what my friend says.

I came across these words from St Anselm of Canterbury:

“Come now little man! Flee for a while from your tasks, hide yourself for a little space from the turmoil of your thoughts. Come, cast aside your burdensome care, and put aside your laborious pursuits. For a little while, give your time to God, and rest in him for a little while. Enter into the chamber of your mind, shut out all things save God and whatever aids you in seeking God; and having barred the door of your chamber, seek him.”

And, these wonderful anonymous words:

*“Life gets choked by busy living,
kindness so lost in fussy giving,
that love slips by unseen.”*

It seems to me that the heart of what Jesus is telling us on the Fourth Sunday of Easter, which we call Good Shepherd Sunday, is precisely about His love for us, just as we are, despite all our faults and failures. Father Ernest Ferlita has a beautiful commentary on this Gospel saying:

“To be known as we are and yet to be loved. To be loved because of what we are. With a love that by its very nature makes us better than we are because it awakes in us all that is good and lovely and true.”

Christ using the lovely image of the Shepherd and his sheep, says in the Gospel that He knows His sheep and because they know Him, they follow Him: “The sheep that belong to me listen to my voice.”

The image of the Shepherd and the sheep is not as familiar these days as it was in society in the time of Our Lord. But it is an image that has endured over the centuries as “a

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primary image” runs the commentary in Loyola Press Sunday Connection: “Its power to describe the relationship between Jesus and His followers transcends direct experience with sheep. The image speaks to us about the protection, security and care that shepherds represent for their sheep.... Today’s Gospel speaks powerfully about the familiarity and intimacy between Jesus and His disciples, expressed as recognizing and knowing another’s voice.”

Going back to the words in the Hymn “teach me still thy voice to hear”. After some consideration, I chose images to go with the Burning Bush VLOG. The first was of Jesus raising Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary. The miracle is recounted in Chapter 11 of St John’s Gospel. Jesus goes to the tomb and says in a loud voice, “Lazarus, here! Come out.” This event is a sign of the Resurrection; in St John it is part of his presentation of Jesus as the life, even after all hope is gone. We are told Jesus wept at the death of His friend; even in death Lazarus hears the voice of Jesus.

For the second image in the VLOG (10 mins of Scripture, Reflection, Hymn, music and silent prayer) I chose the mosaic of the Apparition of Our Lady in the Basilica of Knock in Ireland: I did so because it is the month of Mary who is famous for “pondering God’s Word”, listening to His voice, and also because it is the only Apparition of Our Lady with the Lamb on the Altar and the empty Cross, a metaphor for the sacrifice of Jesus for humankind.

There is plenty for us to ponder too in the Gospel of the Fourth Sunday, and we shouldn’t forget the First Reading from the Acts of the Apostles where it is recounted, that filled with joy and the Holy Spirit, Paul and Barnabas went out to proclaim the good news of Jesus and His Resurrection. They say: “This is what the Lord commanded us to do when he said: ‘I have made you the light of the nations, so that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.’”

On Good Shepherd Sunday we pray for Vocations to the Priesthood that the Mission of Paul and Barnabas may continue in our day. However, the words of the Hymn “Teach me still thy voice to hear” are for all of us: we can all sow the seed of the good news of Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

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