

Fr. Larry's Homily – Apr. 29, '07

Good morning! Are y'inz ready to receive communion for the first time? Yeah? You know how long ago it was when I received my first communion? Take a guess! Four hundred years? You little pagan child. Don't encourage them. How long? 30? Gotta get a little bit deeper – you're better though, I love you. What a girl! 39 – real close. Forty years ago. Forty years ago, that's old isn't it! Say, "No, Father. Nooo that's soooo young!" But forty years ago I received my first communion, and I still remember it very, very well. I can still remember walking in, I can still remember Sister – Dolores was our Sister - oh my! And Sister told us, you know when you come walking in you have to have your hands real tight like this? And we had to do that, and you want to know why she told me not to? She said, "Now kids, keep your hands real tight because you don't want the devil to get between your fingers, do you?" So I remember sitting there for my first Holy Communion walking in thinking, "No devil's getting in between my fingers! Oh no they're not! Absolutely not!" And so no devil got between my fingers, but I was so concerned about that that I almost forgot what was most important. What's the most important thing that's going to happen to you today? You receive Jesus Christ. Absolutely! That's the most wonderful thing.

And today we hear the Gospel – today's what we call Good Shepherd Sunday. Because today we focus on Jesus as our shepherd. Now if you listen to the Gospel today, did everybody hear it? Everybody in first communion, you all listened to the Gospel right? That was the one I read, could you all hear it? What did Jesus say? Give me one thing He said in the Gospel that I read. He said, "My sheep hear My voice. They hear My voice and they follow after Me." And then He says, "And I will give them everlasting life." The greatest thing ever. The God of the universe sits there and says, 'I am their shepherd, they hear Me, they follow after Me, and I will give them everlasting life.' And He says, "I hold them" where? Does anybody know? Jesus says where He holds you today. No, not "My heart" – very good though. "I hold them in My *hand*." Very good! He holds them in His hand. And He says, "Nobody can take them out of my hand."

So what's that mean for us today? There are three things that we've got to focus on. One, that Jesus is our shepherd for all of us. And if He's our shepherd what do we have to do to him? We have to listen to Him. "Hear My voice!" So the way we listen to Jesus is we spend time with him in prayer. That means you've got to pray every day,

right kids? You know since I first received my first communion, it was one of the biggest things in my life. I used to cry because my parents didn't go to Mass much, can you imagine? I remember telling my mother, I was sitting there fighting with my mother because I wanted to go to communion so bad and I said, "Mom! I have to go to church this week! It's a mortal sin to miss Mass on Sundays, mom. And I'll go to Hell if I miss Mass." Can you imagine me saying that to my mother? And you know what my mother said? She said, "No, it won't be your sin, it'll be mine." And I said, "Then you're going to Hell mom." Can you imagine? I said that to my mother! Oh my gosh! But then she took me to Mass right away because she didn't want to hear that from her little kid.

But it was so important to me to receive Jesus in the Eucharist, because that's the way that you and I can listen to Jesus. Because when we come before him in the Eucharist He holds us. Remember every week, what do we do here? At the end of communion, what do we do? We say, "Jesus, hold me." And did you ever see the picture up there? See that picture up there, that's the Good Shepherd up in the corner. One of the few churches in the whole diocese of Erie that have the Good Shepherd in our windows. And what Jesus does is he holds onto that sheep. When you and I go to communion, Jesus holds on to us. And when He holds onto you every day, who doesn't need that? You know I'm 47 years old, and I still need Jesus to hold me every day. And so every day when I go into his presence, and I get to be so blessed as a priest because how often do I get to receive communion? How often do you think I receive communion? Every day! Because its, "give us this day our daily bread." Yes! So every day I get to receive Jesus, and every day when I receive Jesus I go back and I let Jesus hold me. And it's like Him putting us in His hand. So Jesus today says, "I will never let you go." When you and I become one with Jesus in the Eucharist, He says, "Nobody can take you out of my hand." Isn't that great? That no matter what, nobody can let you be separated from Jesus. Nobody can take you out of the hand of Jesus Christ. That's a glorious thing. So every time you receive Jesus, you become one with Jesus, and He says, "Nobody can take you out of my hand." And then He says, "Anyone who comes to Me, I will give them everlasting life." Just think, when you and I receive communion today, just like you and I, what do we do every day to keep up alive? We eat and drink, absolutely. And if we stop eating and drinking, guess what happens? We die. Is it God's fault we die if we stop eating and drinking? No. So what do you think we've got to do

to live forever? Eat and drink what? Eat the body of Jesus and drink His precious blood. And we receive to eat the body of Jesus and drink his blood, we will live forever.

So isn't that a great thing today? Today you begin your journey with Jesus, and today Jesus feeds you now with His own precious body and His own precious blood so that you can live forever. So the most important thing that you'll ever do in your life is what? Receive communion. Because by receiving communion Jesus promises that we will become one with him, and we will live forever. What a great gift? And then He says we've got to follow him now. So what we have to do every day is we really have to be people that pray every day. You know right after my first communion we got all these little gifts, I got little pins, did you guys get little pins? That say your first communion? Oh I used to have one, and I got this little kneeling thing and everything else. And you know what I did right after my first communion? This is how weird the priest is, but you can all do the same thing. I went home and I made a little altar in my room, and I took all my first communion stuff and I put it on that altar. And I had a crucifix there and a statue of the Blessed Mother there, and I had like a little kneeler there. Can you imagine I made this little kneeler? And every day for the rest of my life, I would go there every day and I would say my prayers. Because I wanted to be one with Jesus Christ. You can do that, huh? Because what you and I've got to do is follow Jesus. Not just receive Him in communion today. Not just say there and know I'm going to live forever. But what I've got to do and what you've got to do now is follow Him every day of our life. And if you and I follow Him every day, and we get intimate with Him every day, then we will live forever. And then you know, stuff will happen in your life and it will be okay because you'll never be alone. You don't ever have to be along again, because from this day forward who lives inside of you? Jesus. So you're never alone.

So today, Jesus gives us a promise. He says, "My sheep hear my voice, they follow me, I will give them everlasting life, no one will take them out of my hand." And that's for all of us here, and that's most especially for you receiving your First Communion today. Got it? Get it? Good! May each of you know his love today and forever, Amen.