

May 3, 2009

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter - Cycle B

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Today is Good Shepherd's Sunday as we have talked about. And we focus on first of all the First Shepherd, the Good Shepherd, the only Shepherd of the Church, which is Jesus Christ. Every priest, every bishop, we are just part of the true Shepherd of Jesus. He is the Good Shepherd. He is the one who does everything. We participate in His priesthood. But as we focus on this Good Shepherd Sunday, we need to be first of all be grateful for all the priests that have went before us and we also need to focus on all the priests that are to be hopefully from this congregation today. Today is the day that we pray for vocations, that we ask God to continue to pour out His Spirit on more young men to be priests and brothers and religious and more young women to become good holy sisters. It will be a glorious thing if we start getting more and more sisters from our parish. To divinely pray for this because it is one body that we truly give glory to God. So we need to pray for all of those vocations.

But what we want to focus on today is the Gospel. And Jesus says the Good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. So first of all we have to begin that mode that we need to be grateful that Christ dies for us. So today is a day of total gratitude of the God of the Universe who says to you and me that you are worth dying for. That I have already and every day we come to Mass He gives up His life for us. That the God of the Universe keeps giving and giving and giving and we need to be people who it says hear His voice. Listen to My voice. And He says He will lead us. But I want to focus on more than anything else is... "Mine know Me and I know them." They know us; that we should know Jesus. He can tell that we are truly His sheep, if we know Jesus Christ. So the very first question we have to really focus on for all of us. Are we people that really know Jesus?

You know there is a famous story. I know I have preached it before. You have probably heard it many times before. But it focuses very beautifully on what we are going to focus on tonight. And that is about the great orator. He goes to this place and they sit there and you know he is... he loves everybody knows he is famous. He is a great actor and everybody is at this big thing and they say, "Would you please read us the readings? Would you read us Psalm 23? We want to hear you say this. Would you please?" And he goes, "Oh no." "Oh come on, please?" It was a packed place. He says, "Okay, I will do it. And Father So and So can do it after me." "Oh sure it is okay, fine." And so the guy gets up and he says, "The Lord is my Shepherd there is nothing I shall want." And he goes on. He reads it beautifully. People stand up when he is done. They clap and whistle. People go nuts over this guy. He goes, "Okay, okay you heard me. Now I want you to listen to Father." And so he says, "Father would you please stand up and would you please read Psalm 23?" And Father gets up and he says, "The Lord is my Shepherd there is nothing I shall want." And he reads it so beautifully that when he is done, nobody says a word. There is silence. And then the famous man gets up and he says, "You know the difference between the two of us don't you? I know the Psalms of the Orator but Father knows the Shepherd." Are we people that truly know the shepherd?

You know so often when we get in to this thing... you know one religion is as good as another. We are all in to this infinite intimate thing. All things lead to God. That is nice. But the reality is nobody else, there isn't one other person that ever came to Earth and said I was god. Buddha didn't do it. Mohammad didn't do it. Nobody ever did it. With all the philosophies that there are, only one person came to this earth and said, "I am God and I will give My life for you." And see a lot of people go through the thing of saying oh yeah I believe ok that is the way I was brought up. I believe it. That is why when you go to church, you are bored out of your gourd and it is no big deal. "I am a good Catholic. I even went to Notre Dame." And we all know about that now-a-days. "So look at all of that. Look what I do." It doesn't mean squat you go to Notre Dame. It doesn't mean squat that you go to daily or weekly Mass. It doesn't mean anything unless you know the Shepherd. And going through the motions will never get you to know the Shepherd. To get to know the Shepherd he says, "My sheep will hear my voice." And so what that means for us is that we need to be people that to hear the voice of the Shepherd what do we have to do? Listen. That means we have to spend time listening to Jesus every day. We have to listen and hear His voice and Jesus will always speak to us, always, if we listen.

So the question very simply to you, we are not talking about being Catholic. We are not talking about going to church. We are talking about; do you listen to the voice of your Shepherd? Do you know the Shepherd? "Mine know me and I know them." It is this intimacy Jesus wants from you and me. The Shepherd gladly gives His life, gladly because He knows His sheep. And so one of the things I guess would be a response is if we know Jesus, we would gladly, gladly give up our life for Him. You know I became a priest 20 years ago. It wasn't because I wanted to be a social worker. I could have been a social worker and had sex everyday if I wanted to be a social worker. Huh? I could've gone out and made lots of money and done all that kind of stuff. That isn't what I wanted. It wasn't because I wanted to get to church has almost killed me more than once in my life. You know the church threw me out of Seminary. The church looked at me once through one of its members and says, "Larry, it is like you have a cancer. You'd never be a good priest. It is your personality." And I have been crucified, died and buried by this Church many times. It isn't that.

The thing that called me into priesthood 20 years ago and let me enter the seminary, 32 years ago... anyway I am still older than Father Michael, but what got me into the seminary, I will never forget when I wrote to go to seminary, I said, "I want to be a priest because I want to proclaim to the whole world, Jesus Christ." That is all I wanted was to proclaim to the whole world Jesus Christ. That I wanted to be the one who converted the world. And hopefully with the Foundation that is what we are going to do. The reality is, the reason I stayed in priesthood, the reason I entered into priesthood is because I just wanted to love Jesus more. And again there have been times I haven't been a very good shepherd as some of you can attest to. But the thing is you get up and you keep following. You get up and you keep listening to His voice. You get up and you say, "Jesus, use me in spite of me."

And that needs to be for all of us. If we know the shepherd because we are good listeners, fine. If you are in your heart of hearts you say, "You know, I don't know the Shepherd well enough." You get up and you keep going. You get up and you keep trying. You commit to yourself today for the rest of your life that you give 5 minutes every day to the Lord, every day. And in those 5 minutes you listen to Him. So when the day comes and you and I take our last breath, what it ultimately comes down to, Jesus looks at

you, He looks at me and says, "I know you and you know Me. Come on home." Do you know Him that intimately? That is what He is dying for. But it is up to you. Beginning today, if you don't know Him that intimately, what are you going to do about it? You need to spend time. Got it? Get it? Going to do it? I hope. May each of you know His love today and forever, amen.