

[Readings: Acts 13:14, 43-52; Psalm 100; Rev. 7:9, 14b-17; John 10:27-30]

Today is what we call in the preaching business a "3-Ring Celebration." First of all, it's Mother's Day, so Happy Mother's Day to all the moms out there! Believe it or not, some folks come up to me after Mass and wish me a Happy Mother's Day! Today is also the World Day of Prayer for Vocations to the priesthood and religious life. It is also Good Shepherd Sunday. So, if you spot a good shepherd around anywhere, thank him for being a good shepherd!

Someone asked me before Mass, does this mean that we are getting three homilies today? I replied, "Oh, no, I wouldn't preach THAT long. Just two homilies today!"

A friend was talking about a time she was sorely tempted toward revenge. A person at work had hurt her and now it was in her power to turn the tables. She found out something about this co-worker that would have deeply embarrassed the woman, and my friend savored the possibility of spreading the news.

Wouldn't YOU do the same thing? I would if I had dirt on someone who had just humiliated me in front of others!

Then she heard her grandmother's voice. Her grandmother had been her spiritual hero, and even though the elderly woman had died years ago, my friend often heard her words echoing in her heart. Today she heard, "Revenge spills on everyone -- including the one who dishes it out." It made her pause, and she reconsidered. Reluctantly she came to the conclusion that the right thing to do was to just keep quiet and let this chance for sweet revenge pass by.

We all hear voices in our heads. Some people call it the "committee." Psychiatrists call it schizophrenia! Catholics call it your conscience or your memory. And we're influenced by those voices we hear. Parents hope their children will hear parental voices in their consciences loud and clear when they're tempted to take crazy chances or stray from the right path. I hear my Mom's voice say, "Don't go there. Don't do that! You'll be sorry!"

Jesus says, "My sheep hear my voice; I know them and they follow me." With all the noise going on in the world, it can take consistent effort to hear the voice of Jesus. Why not begin your morning with this prayer: "Jesus, help me to hear Your voice." And then just sit and listen.

We are the sheep who recognize our Shepherd's voice and willingly follow Him to better pastures. We want Him to be our Good Shepherd. We want His protection, His guidance, and His love. However, sometimes we forget to listen for His voice. This usually happens when life doesn't go as planned, the way we want it to. In frustration and fear, we assume that Jesus has left the sheepfold.

However, no matter how busy Jesus gets, and no matter how far He has to go to rescue lost sheep, He never leaves our side. He is always with us, even if at first we don't like what He's saying.

In what areas of your life do you feel lost and alone or abandoned? What activities can you do that will restore your vision and your hearing so you can recognize the presence of your Good Shepherd as our spiritual underdog?

There seems to be a primordial instinct in most human beings to support the underdog. We read about it in fairy tales like "Jack and the Beanstalk." We see it in sports with the lithe receiver avoiding the onrushing linebacker twice his size. It happens in politics when the candidate without the clout takes on the political powerhouse and wins. It continues in movies like *The Lord of the Rings* when Frodo beats unbelievable odds.

Two thousand years ago, the Church began its history as an incredible underdog. There is no good reason -- other than their message -- for Paul and Barnabas to be listened to, much less heard, and ultimately responded to. But they are, to the point of being persecuted. Strengthened by the Holy Spirit, aflame with the message of Jesus, the disciples speak boldly and unafraid. They don't hesitate in moving on if not listened to.

We need to ask ourselves how boldly our lives preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ -- at home, in the workplace, at school, and with our neighbors. The louder our voices proclaim the Word of God, the more confident we grow, the closer we come in attaining that life of perfection. And ultimately we will someday join the

great multitude that stands before the Lamb of God in heaven forever. Not bad for the underdog!

On this Good Shepherd Sunday, as we observe the World Day of Prayer for Vocations, it's appropriate for us to consider the nature of authentic vocation. The word itself means "calling." *Vocare*, vocal. We hear that we're all called by God -- all of us, not just priests and religious. But what does it mean to be called? How should we listen for it, and what are we to do about it?

Jesus says His sheep recognize His voice, and because they do, they follow where He leads. Evidently, "call" involves more than a word spoken or message received. It also implies a word *heeded*. The way we respond is not merely to hear the call but to reply with our behavior. We *follow*, as we heard in last Sunday's Gospel. This response requires our consent. And our action.

In our Second Reading, we see that every true vocation has Heaven as its ultimate goal, and is also ordered toward bringing other people to Heaven. Ask yourselves: when you stand before the throne of God, whom will YOU have helped attain Heaven?" Who is in Heaven now because of YOUR example and YOUR witness? Can you imagine standing before Jesus and Him saying to, "Well, look who's here because of YOU!"

Finally, on this Mother's Day, I share with you a reflection from Michelle Martin, a Catholic writer for the National Catholic Register. All the following words are hers:

Being a mother is wonderful. It comes with sweet-smelling newborns and sticky-fingered hugs from toddlers and teenagers that can blow you away with their surprising insights on life. But it's hard, and getting harder, especially for Catholic moms who are trying to raise their children in the Faith.

According to many women who write and talk about family life and motherhood, mothers are so immersed in the busyness of daily life -- which, for most, includes professional, paid work as well as caring for their children and their homes -- that they often feel alone.

Mothers also are suffering from a lack of respect. We are so belittled in our maternity. There never has been a time when mothers were less sacred to society than they are now. It's harder than ever before.

I think the world has become a scary, scary place for children, and I think the world has become a scary, scary place to raise children. Even if public schools in years past did not teach religion, they did teach right and wrong.

There's parent peer pressure too. My parents were never afraid to say no. Today I think there's pressure to not be strict, to be your kids' best friend and buddy. And I think it's very hard to stand up to parent peer pressure. Our kids are watching 'Keeping Up with the Kardashians' and so many of us want to be the cool mom, the mom that doesn't say no.

That's not good for children, or for their parents. You have to be a loving, caring authority figure. Technology has amplified the challenges, both for parents and their children. Teenagers come home from school and can see what all the cool kids are doing in real time.

It's harder for parents to be the primary influence on their children. I think parents start out saying they're going to be vigilant and do everything right, but it's exhausting, and you will slip up. You're not going to be perfect. But you have to keep being vigilant. Kids can just be led down rabbit holes of danger.

One way mothers can combat their own isolation and keep tabs on their children is to form their own relationships with other parents, especially the parents of their children's friends. That way, they can assure their 9-year-olds that no, they are not the only child in their class without a smartphone, because they know for a fact that at least three other kids don't have one.

It makes parents feel less alone to know that other parents are going through the same thing.

Finding that community is important for both parents and for their children, who benefit from the positive example.

Parents also have to make sure they spend time with their children even when they think their children don't want to. Teenagers tell me all the time that they want their parents to be with them and to talk to them.

Parents looking for practical ideas can turn to online sources such as [CatholicMom.com](http://CatholicMom.com), which was founded in 2000 by Lisa Hendey. She started the site, which was acquired by Holy Cross Family Ministries in 2017.

Finding the right online and in-person communities is so important, because mothers who are having rough days can fall into the trap of looking at Facebook or Instagram or Pinterest images posted by mothers who appear to have their lives and homes and families all pulled together and accessorized perfectly. Or they can go to the sites where people say that if your kids are still breathing, you're doing fine, and that's not good either.

That means telling other mothers that they're doing great when they need to hear that, and calling them to step up when they need that. Sometimes what we need to hear is, "You can do this." We need to affirm each other and build each other up." That's a good note to end upon! Happy Mother's Day! ALLELUIA and AMEN!