

St Pius & St Anthony Homily 4th Sunday Easter Year C (2025) Luke

Jesus says, “My sheep hear my voice!” (Jn 10:27) The sheep KNOW the Shepherd’s voice (Voice is so important). And for a shepherd, voice had two dimensions of comfort 1) it was personal -yes shepherd called the sheep, but don’t you know they also talked to the sheep. But on another level, 2) they also sang & used music with the sheep. David is a classic example of a musical shepherd, but many biblical shepherds had instruments always along with them on the hillsides (think of our western cowboys playing guitar and singing on the range at nights while the cattle slept/rest) The Shepherd’s instruments might include a stringed lyre, or flute pipe they used to soothe and corral & call their flock together by, but they also might use horns to alarm other shepherds about predators or scare off those predators. So, voice, sound and music were crucial tools for a shepherd, and the sheep knew those sounds! What a comfort-just like we may play and replay a favorite song or refrain for our own comfort- or converse with friends and family often to hear them talk, the sheep know the Shepherd’s voice. But additionally, our Good Shepherd Jesus knows our voice too, as the very next phrase in John 10:27, is “I know them” – He knows our voice too. And the shepherd could know his/her sheep by their voice or their sounds (grunts, breath or body shakes/moves).

Don’t we see such recognition from our Mothers? Like a mother super-tuned in to her child’s voice. Doesn’t it amaze us how mothers can be sleeping soundly, and amid the TV noise, maybe a train passing by outside and other kids’ chatter, it is the mother’s own child’s whimpering from the cradle, that can pierce through all of that other noise, for her to hear her own child. That’s a mom’s ear (like a shepherd) sensitized especially to her child’s voice! What a comfort, and since this is Mothers’ Day, we thank our mom’s today for that loving attention, and we thank God for providing such shepherding care to us of His, through our mothers!

To all mothers, we ask God to bless you for your many years of nurturing care that you have given to us, and for (*I’m not saying anything you don’t know*) but for your ***patient, patient*** love of us!

When I think of that special ear of mothers, it reminds me of one time with my family, when we were packing up-ready to leave a Neel Family Reunion, and my younger brother called out ‘Patty, Patty, (*my mom’s name*) does this box go to the car?’ And My Dad quickly, but firmly intervened, “What are you doing, she is ***mother*** to you?” And my brother’s claim was, “If I say ‘Mom’, all the ladies here in the room, will turn & answer, but there is only one Patty in here.” But my dad insisted he try it again, and watch how unique a mother’s ear is sensitized to her child’s voice. Moms, like shepherds, know - she’d hear his voice, locking in on him! Moms know. And what **a comfort** that can be for us!

Speaking of comfort, that in this reading where Jesus identifies Himself as our Good Shepherd, He teaches about how fully He cares and provides for us. The reading today is only four verses (vss. 27-30), yet two times in vs 28 & 29, Jesus assures us, “No one can take them out of my hand (v 28) or the Father’s (v29) hand.” Jesus is on it. When He has us, then He really has us! What a comfort! ‘In His hand’ – there is no snatching out, Jesus always has a firm hold on us. That is blessed assurance! Complete security & peace.

Being in safe/secure hands, calls to mind for me, the times when we were all out on family swimming trip, and my mom tried to teach us kids how to float in water. Often it’d come about probably because we were so disruptive, creating waves around her in the water and as an attempt to settle us down or quiet us, she would challenge us, “You can do this, too!” We’d probably been playing Marco-Polo tag, the game where someone is IT and has their eyes closed. Every time that IT-they yell out ‘Marco’ then everyone else has have to respond yelling out ‘Polo’, as a type of giveaway of our location if they follow the sound. But kids would splash to confuse the ears of the IT person. The splashing and commotion, I am sure made mom’s floating that much harder. So she would try to occupy us with a floating lesson. But it was an awesome lesson in trust, and having it reinforced to us that someone (she) is holding you up and keeping you safe (in her hands). We would lay back on the water, and she would hold arms out like a rack to support us. She told us to keep our body straight, chest up and out, and that the biggest challenge was to control the breath – hold and gently let it out, as water encroached upon the chest, learning when just the right time was to exhale and then refill the lungs again to maintain the float.

The real lesson for me, was that while we may have been afraid while learning (oh, the water is swallowing me!), since she was standing on lake bottom, and holding-suspending us with both arms, she could lift a little when we’d panic sink. Her protection and hold were most important – she was holding on and no wave or water was going to take me out of her hand. That was security, all that was needed to manage the fear. That brought the peace! Just like Jesus, the Good Shepherd in the gospel today. When we entrust ourselves into His care, listen for His voice, and speak out-calling His Name, then we can feel confident of feeling his hands/arms to hold us. The Good Shepherd to care for and provide for His sheep. What a comfort and peace, He alone can bring to us!