

April 29, 2007

Fourth Sunday of Easter

Good Morning. Today, as we said in the introduction, is Good Shepherd Sunday. And if we listen to the gospel, as we already alluded to, Jesus says to you and me “my sheep hear my voice...I know them, and they follow me.” So the first thing that Jesus calls us to is He calls us to be His sheep. He calls us to be the one that He takes care of. And the way that we do that, if we know anything about sheep, of course, I’m a Pittsburgher, I can only tell you what I read, but what they talk about is that sheep know the voice of their master – and even if there are two shepherds there and there are two groups of sheep – when the one shepherd calls his, all of his sheep know his voice and they follow him, and they will leave the other sheep and they will follow their shepherd, because they know that their shepherd is the one who takes care of them, who protects them, who gives their life for them, that will do anything for the sheep. But for the sheep to be protected, for the sheep to be taken care of – they have to follow the voice of their shepherd. So must we. So, again, so often we are called, and there are so many voices that are thrown out to us and we all listen to different voices. But there is only one voice we are called to listen to – the voice of our Shepherd. Now, the shepherd is not Oprah, the shepherd is not Dr. Phil, the shepherd is not the latest self-help book. The shepherd is not the psychologist you happen to see – maybe, maybe not. The shepherd is nobody else, except for Jesus Christ. He says He is the Shepherd. “My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow after me.” Now, how do we hear the voice of our Shepherd? This is what it comes down to, because whose voice do you listen to? So, to belong to the Shepherd, we have to listen to His voice. How do we listen to His voice? Now, the first thing we talked about many times here – we talked about the first thing we have to do to hear the voice of the Shepherd – Jesus - is to be a person of prayer. And in our person of prayer – a prayer of silence. That means when you and I make any kind of decision, do you say “oh, I’m just going to do this today...?” You know, James was very clear – “never say I am going to do this...” you don’t even know if you have your breath this afternoon. God could take your breath now! You could be in heaven or hell this very afternoon! Aren’t you excited? This is why – you have no idea when you say “this is what I am going to do.” You have no idea! So John says “if God wills it – this is what I will do.” So that means before we do anything, we pray about it! “God, is this your will for me?” Especially major decisions - but even little ones. “God, is this your will for me?” And that means, when we go to prayer, we don’t just sit there and say “bless me, bless me, bless me...take care of me, take care of me, take care of me...bless my family, help me, I want to win the lottery, please let me go to the casino, let me win lots of money.” That’s all very nice and good. But when you and I pray, it’s “Lord, what do you want of me? I’ll do anything you want.” Now, if we just start prayer every day with that – “I will do anything you want – now tell me...” and we have this open heart and want to listen to the Lord. And you’ll sit there and say, “well I don’t hear it...” well, then you have to listen longer. “Well, Father...” you have to listen longer. So you sit there, if you give Him permission, God will speak to you. But you have to have prayer, you have to have silence, and you have to have a heart that is open to listening. And so “Lord I am here to listen to your voice.” So in your prayer life, lets just think...hmmmm...do you have a listening heart? When you

go do you say “I am here Lord, to do what you want? You tell me.” Then you shut up long enough so that God can tell you – first way to hear the voice of God. The second way to hear the voice of God is His word – to spend time with His word every day. And again, we have talked about this many, many, many times, but it doesn’t matter how many times you talk about it because people still don’t do it, because they say....you know, like again it got back to me the other day that you know, when Father says to read the bible, you know, “when we were young, we were told to never read the bible!” Well, its time to change! You know who says so? The Holy Father – Pope Benedict XVI. This week in one of his audiences, he says “every Catholic should read the bible...” Did you hear that? That’s not your pagan pastor – that’s the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI says “every Catholic must read the word of God – go and read it yourself!” So, this is the Holy Father tells us, so if you use that stupid excuse – “this is the way I was brought up...” well, then it is time to change. I don’t see anybody dead in here! If you are not dead yet that means that you can still learn. That means that you are still growing, and if you are not growing, you are dying, and if you are dying then you are not in Jesus Christ, because Jesus Christ is life. So, will you listen to our Holy Father, and that is going to be the next thing – do you spend time with the word of God every day? And some of you sit there and say “well Father, I don’t have time.” Really. Do you watch the news? Do you watch Oprah? Do you watch Dr. Phil? Do you watch Lost? Do you have time to watch TV? Hmmmm. Now how can you sit there and say you don’t have time to read the word of God? And if you can’t read the word of God, then you can go buy one of those CDs and listen to the word of God – they are in almost every translation that you can imagine. And to sit there and take time, because the TV isn’t going to save you – it just isn’t – I’m sorry! It isn’t going to make you happy – it isn’t going to give you peace! I’m sorry about this! In fact, it usually is going to pull you down. The word of God will give you peace – the word of God will give you everlasting life. “Those who are my sheep hear my voice...” So, the second way is to spend time with the word of God. The third way to hear the voice of God is through the chief shepherd, and through church. So, the chief shepherd today is who? Pope Benedict XVI, thank you very much! So, he is the one who is on earth today to proclaim God’s word to us who have a hard time listening. So, when was the last time you read anything by Pope Benedict XVI?? You don’t just watch TV and the news every day and every once in awhile they will say something that the Holy Father said. Whoa!!! You know, those of you that have internet access, which is more, more and more, you can get something called Zenit, and this Zenit gives you – every day the Holy Father says things, you know, and every day it will send you what the Holy Father says. You don’t have to do anything except to sign-up for it and subscribe to it. And when you subscribe, automatically it comes into your email every day. And now, every day you can read what the Church is teaching! Every day you can be right on top of things! And every day, listen to the voice of the Lord through the Church. The fourth way to listen to God’s voice is by having a spiritual director. Now, St. Phillip Neri said that those who have themselves for a spiritual director have a fool for a spiritual director. How many of us are fools? To have a spiritual director – and it doesn’t have to be a priest – it could be a nun, it could be a lay person, anyone who is in tune with the word of God. St. Therese of Avila said “to listen to your spiritual director is to listen to the voice of God.” So, do we have someone who we can sit there and at least – if we can’t get a spiritual director, is there one other person who we can talk about our spiritual life with,

who will give us true feedback about where we are before the Lord? That they are a person of prayer and they challenge us to be people of prayer? To others through the Body of Christ is the way we listen to the voice of the Lord. So today, Jesus Christ tells us “my sheep are the ones who hear my voice and follow me.” How do we hear His voice? We pray, we read the word of God, we listen to the Church, especially the Holy Father, and we get directors or mentors in our life that will lead us and guide us in the faith. Four ways that we can hear God’s voice. So, do you do any of those four things? Because who you listen to is who your shepherd is. Who are you listening to? May each of you know His love, today and forever. Amen.