

Fourth Sunday of Easter 2017 (First Communion Weekend)  
St. Mary Catholic Church, Richmond VA  
Fr. Michael A. Renninger

*(Fr. Michael started this homily by holding up a Smart Phone and showing it to the congregation...)*

How many of you have one of these? Or maybe your parents have one of these?

Smart phones are great inventions. Think of all the things you can do with this phone? I can call my dad and brother from anywhere! I can watch my favorite Bugs Bunny cartoons. I can listen to Elvis 24 hours a day. I can order cases of Oreo cookies on Amazon Prime with the two hour deliver option. It's amazing what you can do with smart phones.

But sometimes, I think that smart phones are making us dumb!

Like when I see a family sitting around a dinner table somewhere. And no one is actually talking to each other – they are all looking at the little screen.

And smart phones are only as smart as the people who use them.

I remember something which happened a few years ago. Friends of mine were driving from Atlanta to Scranton, Pa. They were coming up Interstate 81. I had not seen them in years, so we arranged that we would get together.

My friend had just gotten a new smart phone, and it had one of those apps where you type in an address and then it gives you directions and the phone talks to you and tells you where to go. She loved this app. Her husband did not like it, because, as we know, men never like to ask for directions - not even from their phones!

So, we agreed to meet in Harrisonburg, Virginia, because I was going to be out that way for a presentation. We agree to meet at the Starbucks in Harrisonburg. My friend said that she would program it into her phone and the app would tell them how to get there.

We agreed to meet at noon. Well, noon came, and went. They were not there. 12:30 came and went. They were not there. I texted them and asked where they were. She responded that they had left much earlier than they had planned, but the phone told them they were still 90 minutes away from Harrisonburg. So I had lunch, went shopping, got gas in my car. Waited.

Two hours later, they still had not arrived. So, finally, I called them.

“Where are you?” I asked.

My friend said, “Um, we made a mistake. Talk to my husband.” So he got on the phone. “Where are you?” I asked. And he said with an angry voice, “we are not where we should be!”

I said, “OK, Just tell me where you are and we will figure out how to get you here.”

He said, “Oh no, that’s not going to be possible. I *told* my wife that something was wrong. I *told* her that we shouldn’t listen to that darned voice on the phone. But she kept insisting that we had to listen to the voice of the computer.

“So where are you,” I asked?

He said, “we are not in Harrisonburg. We are in Harrisburg... Pennsylvania.”

It turns out that when she typed in the destination, she made a mistake! And as they drove up Interstate 81, her husband kept saying, “we are going the wrong way. We have gone too far. We’re not even in Virginia any more!” And his wife kept saying, “Just do what the computer tells you to do. The voice will get us to Harrisonburg.”

Well, the voice got them to the wrong place.

This teaches us two important things.

Frist, that men have always been right – we don’t need to ask directions!

Second – if you don’t have your destination right, the voice will get you lost.

Did you notice in today’s Gospel how many times Jesus talks about ‘listening to the voice?’ And Jesus is not talking about listening to the voice of your smart phone. Jesus is reminding us that we have to listen to HIS voice, because he will always tell us the right thing, and he will always give us good instructions, and he will always give us the best directions.

Jesus says today that his sheep ‘hear his voice.’ They ‘listen to his voice.’ He is the shepherd who wants to lead us in the right direction. So we are the sheep, who listen to the voice of Jesus, and follow him as he leads us in life.

And Jesus promises that if we listen to him, and follow him, he is going to lead us to a full and

wonderful life here on earth, and to the eternal life that never ends.

We can trust the voice of Jesus. He will always get us where we should go.

But sometimes we forget that we human beings were created to be with God. We were created to be close to Jesus. That's why we were born.

And if we forget that, then we may make the mistake my friend made with her phone. She typed in the wrong destination. So she ended up in the wrong place. If I forget that my goal, my destination, is to be close to Jesus, then I may go in the wrong direction, and end up in the wrong place in life. I wander away. I end up feeling far from God, and far from the people who love me.

But the good news is – even if we get lost, Jesus is ready to find us, and lead us home, and forgive us, and give us what we need.

And that is why this day is so important to the young people in our parish who are receiving their first holy communion.

When we come forward to receive the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist, we are close to Jesus. Every time we come forward to share in this sacrament, Jesus is close to us. Every time we celebrate the Eucharist, we are finding our way home.

In the Mass, Jesus assures us that he always forgives us, even when we get lost. Jesus gives us the strength we need through this bread and wine. And Jesus speaks to us in the readings we hear from the Bible. At Mass, we hear the voice of Jesus.

Isn't it wonderful that God has given us this amazing gift in Holy Communion? Isn't it wonderful that we can find our way home to Jesus every time we come forward for this sacrament?

God, after all, does not want us to get lost in life. So he gives us Jesus. Jesus is our destination and our goal. So let's be *smart* – and listen to the voice of our savior, whose directions always lead us to life.