

Daily Gospel Reflection: May 4, 2020
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The phone call came in early April of 1993. I was at the seminary in Washington, finishing up my last few weeks of school, getting for my ordination as a priest in June of that year. Several friends had told me: "Stay close to the phone! Because the bishop will be calling you soon to tell you what parish you've been assigned to."

That's how it works in the Church. The bishop calls. He says, "This is where you're assigned," and you go.

Now, frankly, I had some *hopes* about where I might be sent. I had heard that Saint Bridget was a nice parish. St. Bede and other big parishes needed priests. I was ready to go to any of them!

And then the call came. I picked up the phone, and I heard his voice...

"Oh, hi Michael. It's Bishop Sullivan calling."

Those of you who knew Bishop Sullivan recognize that voice, don't you? His voice was a combination of Kermit the Frog and Marvin the Martian...

It was *his* voice on the phone. My hands started to sweat. He was calling with my assignment.

I asked him how he was doing, "Oh fine," he said. "I'm a Sandbridge with the puppies, and I wanted to call you with your assignment."

"Yes bishop...." I whispered.

"I have a special assignment for you, friend. I need you to go to ... Grundy."

Grundy? Is that in Virginia? Is that in the United States? I didn't know what to say.

"This is probably a surprise to you, but I think you will do a great job working with the coal miners up there. You're a musician, aren't you? I want you to be the chaplain for the Bluegrass Community in the mountains."

I didn't know what to say! Chaplain to Bluegrass musicians? This was not what I had planned!

But I knew what my vow of obedience meant, so I simply said, “Bishop, I am happy to go wherever you think is best.”

The bishop said goodbye. I hung up the phone. I was tempted to curl up in a ball and cry. But I decided to go down to the chapel to pray.

And as I was leaving my room, the phone rang again. I picked it up. It was not the bishop, but I heard laughter on the other end.

It was another friend, a priest of the diocese. He was laughing. I said, “what are you laughing at?” And he said, “you know that wasn’t the bishop, don’t you?”

I said, “What?”

And he said, “Oh, friend, it was me. April Fools!” I said a word that I later had to go to confession about.

It had not been the Bishop at all. It was my friend doing a very good imitation of Bishop Sullivan’s voice....

I wasn’t quite smart enough to know the difference between the imitation of the bishop’s voice, and the real thing!

In today’s Gospel, Jesus says, “I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep. And they know me.”

Then Jesus says that he will lead ALL of his sheep. How will he lead them? Jesus says: “*They will hear my voice*, and there will be one flock, and one shepherd.”

Did you catch that? Jesus *is* the shepherd, the leader, the master. We are all his sheep, the ones entrusted to his care. How will we know how to follow? Jesus said it: his sheep “*hear his voice*.”

In that one line there is a promise, and a challenge. The *promise* is this – Jesus *promises* to speak to us. Christ did NOT burst forth from the tomb at Easter so that he could stay silent, or far away from us. Our shepherd knows that we have questions, that we desire guidance and truth. Christ *is* the ‘word of everlasting life!’ His voice *is* at work in our world. If we listen, and follow, then our lives here on earth will have direction and value, and we will live forever.

We have questions. His voice guides us to the Truth. That’s the *promise*.

And the *challenge* is this - there are *imitators* out there that try to take the place of the

shepherd!

There are many voices in our world, clamoring for your attention, making demands of you, extending promises to you. There are imitators, confusing you and calling you down the wrong path. We've got to know how to tell the difference between the authentic voice of the Lord, and all of the other imitations out there. If we don't, we'll end up confused, angry, and packing for Grundy.

Now, the ability to *hear* the voice of the Lord takes practice, and work, on our part. For instance, when most people pray, they don't actually 'hear voices.' Rather, God nudges us, guides us, answers us, through intuitions that come while we pray... thoughts that persist... a sense of peace that fills us when we consider one option over others.

Then, we test those insights to see if they are congruent with the truth of the Scriptures, the teachings of the church, the wisdom of the saints, and advice that comes from people we know who *actually* pray. That's how the shepherd's voice often comes to us.

So, as you pray, as you *listen*, pay attention:

- + If the voice you hear encourages you to trust...then it's probably the Lord. If the voice you hear leads you to cynicism, then it's probably an imposter.
- + if the voice you hear calls you to be generous and self-transcending, then it's probably from the Lord. If it calls you to selfishness, self-centeredness, it's an imposter.
- + if the voice you hear calls you to be faithful, to be true to your word, to keep your promises, it's from the Lord. If the voice invites you to break your promise and lie, it's probably an imposter.
- + if you hear an invitation to spend more of your life focused on others, to measure your success by the difference you make in someone *else's* life, it's probably from the Lord.
- +If the voice you hear calls you to be a peacemaker, a justice-doer, a hope-giver, it's from the Lord.
- + if you hear an encouragement to treasure life, set aside angers, forgive and forgive some more, it's from the Lord.
- + if the voice you hear tells you that you are deeply loved by the eternal God, if the voice you hear tells you that you have a dignity that no one can take away from you, if you hear a reminder that that Jesus loves you so much that he was willing to die for you... then that voice is from the Lord. But if the voice you hear tells you that you're not worth it, or that there is no hope for you... It's a lie, from an imposter.

Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. My sheep hear my voice. I lay down my life for them." He

laid down his life *for you*. That's how much he loves you. And in our daily struggle to *know* what's right and *do* what's right, the best thing that we can do is to pray... which means, *listen!*

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