

## Fourth Sunday in Easter – John 10:1-10

Sheep are quite stupid animals. No one keeps sheep as pets. Bro Bill who now lives at Indian Lake on Gov Island, learned the hard way how to be around sheep. When he visited us at Limuru, Kenya at our Novitiate, he went out to see our sheep. I warned him to beware of the ram, who was getting quite fisty because the ewes were receptive. I went with him just in case. He bent over to pick something up on the ground a little too close to the ram, and the animal took it as a challenge. Before you knew it, Bro Bill was lying on the ground. I tried to quickly tell him to get up carefully not to let any of his body face the ram...but too late. Boom, the ram hit him again, in the same spot. I was surprised Bro Bill wasn't seriously injured. This time he got up correctly and we quickly walked away, or Bro. Bill limped away.

No one keeps sheep as pets. Sheep don't typically have a close personal relationship with humans. I can vouch for that. They don't usually recognize our voices and trust us, as dogs and cats do. They have to be coerced, forced by fear, not by love. They go wherever sheepdogs move them by chasing them from behind and nipping at their heels. They are sheepish—passive and stupid like turkeys.

But the sheep in Jesus' parable are not passive and stupid but **active** and **wise**. They are motivated not by fear but **by love**. Jesus says that his sheep are different: they recognize his voice, and trust him, and freely choose to follow him. The Christian life is a life of **wisdom**, and **trust**, and active **freedom**—three qualities ordinary sheep do not have.

**Wisdom** means *discernment*. We can discern the voice of Jesus. We know him; we recognize him; and we recognize his voice, his will, in our conscience. Sheep have no conscience. **Trust** means *faith in a person*, even when we don't understand him. Ordinary sheep move by fear, not faith or trust. And **freedom** means *choice*. We don't follow Jesus automatically, like sheep. We *choose* him. Sometimes that choice is hard and costs something.

So, these sheep of Jesus recognize his voice because they're wise and discerning. They are not suckers. They can tell the difference between Christ and Antichrist, and the difference between the voice of Christ and the voice of the world, and the voice of their own ego. And they have made a free choice to follow Christ.

What struck me the most in this passage from John, is that ***Jesus calls us by name!*** Jesus leads us and calls us by ***our name*** out of love for us. The gospel also mentions that the good shepherd does not come to steal the sheep and slaughter them for lamb chops. Religious leaders have a lot of power over people's souls, and power tends to corrupt, so that the natural temptation of religious leaders is to capture people, to steal sheep, to get big numbers, to add to their own glory. But this shepherd does not steal sheep; Jesus serves the sheep and he dies for them. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Jesus does not spill our blood for him; he spills his own blood for us.

Peter Kreeft compares the Antichrist to Dracula, who does exactly the opposite of what Christ does. Dracula sucks your blood and takes your life away and sucks it into himself. Jesus gives his blood; he gives his life away and puts it into us. Christianity is a kind of blood transfusion. Christ gives us his blood, his life, his divine life. As we become more sensitive in our relationship with the Lord we also become more sensitive to what books we read and what movies we watch.

***Jesus calls us by name.*** Are we listening? Do we hear the Good Shepherd's voice as we read the gospel every day to deepen our relationship with the Lord through personal prayer time and meditation? If we don't practice what the Lord preaches then silly movies like Dracula can have an antichrist effect on us, even though we may see it as entertainment! Some read Harry Potter books with magic and sorcery, but phrases like "Hocus Pocus" is really a mockery of our words of consecration, "Hoc Est Corpus Meum," (This is My Body.) If we hear it enough times we may end up agreeing that it is all magic.

As we spend more time with the Lord, the fog may even clear and we will know what the Lord expects from us, and it may simply be a deeper relationship with him through prayer and quiet time. This sensitivity only increases when we eliminate the distractions in our life. Magic, Dracula, swear words, ...how sensitive are you? In any relationship with another, the closer we become the more sensitive we are even to the words we use. Do we hear the Lord calling us by name?