

Sunday May 8, 2022
Fourth Sunday of Easter
Parishioner Reflection

By: Mary Bastedo

These rich Easter readings are filled with a sense of energy and expansiveness as the early Christians realized that Christ is indeed a light for the Gentiles, bringing salvation to the ends of the earth. John offers us a vision of great multitudes from every nation, tribe, people and language gathered around the throne. At the centre of the throne is the Lamb who is also the shepherd, guiding all people to springs of the water of life. In our globalized world, where we are so painfully aware of distressing news from all over the world, we need that global vision of hope.

In the midst of this magnificence, Christ's identity is strikingly simple: he is the Lamb who is also the Shepherd. Jesus' words in the Gospel are also simple: "My sheep hear my voice. I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish."

In this season of Easter we hear many Gospel accounts about how the disciples came to recognize the risen Jesus. Often they didn't recognize him at first. But something in his gesture or his words or his way of being with them suddenly opened their eyes. For the disciples on the road to Emmaus it was the way he opened the scriptures and broke bread with them. For Peter and those out fishing, it was the way he suggested, "Cast your nets to the right side of the boat" and the amazing catch that followed. For Thomas it was the experience of touching his wounds. For Mary Magdalen, weeping before the empty tomb, it was his voice - the way he spoke her name. In hearing his voice she suddenly recognized him and the intimacy of their relationship was joyfully restored.

"My sheep hear my voice," Jesus says.

Do I know the voice of the shepherd? Do I listen for the way Jesus says my name? Do I recognize his voice, in the midst of so many other voices that bombard me? Our Gospel invites us to listen carefully for that voice and to learn to distinguish it from the busy chatter of voices both within and around us. We are invited to learn to discern the voice of Jesus in our daily lives.

One practice that can help me do that is to reflect prayerfully at the end of my day, asking the Holy Spirit to help me see how Jesus has been present. It's a practice often called an "awareness examen." It begins in gratitude, remembering the gifts of my day, and asks for the light of the Holy Spirit so that I may see and hear more clearly the gestures and voice of the risen Jesus present to me.

People who love me often have a special way of saying my name. When I used to phone my grandmother she would always respond, "Oh hello Mary dear," in her warm, welcoming voice. One of the men at L'Arche Daybreak would shout out when he saw me, "Mary Lamb!" He had a special name for me and a very enthusiastic way of exclaiming it!

What are the voices in your life that open your heart and call you to be your best self? How do they call your name? What is the sound of their voice? Remembering those loving voices can help me be attuned to the voice of Jesus, who knows me intimately and calls me by name, inviting me to follow him, promising me eternal life. Let us be attentive!