

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter  
April 16 & 17, 2016

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Once again Jesus is being questioned: Are you really the Messiah? The leaders had a definite image of the Messiah, one who was to free Israel. They do not listen to Jesus so Jesus explains who really listens to him: "My sheep hear my voice, I know them and they follow me."

I remember being in England for a semester of studies and often went walking close to the sheep folds. Never once did a sheep or lamb come near me. The sheep have ears only for the shepherd. They can recognize his voice in the midst of many voices. If the shepherd were to walk amidst sleeping sheep, they would never be disturbed, but if a stranger were to walk among them they would soon disperse in different directions.

In children's stories there is always a villain: the three pigs and a wolf, Cinderella and the ugly step mother, Luke Skywalker and Darth Vader. It's to say there is danger they will encounter. There are voices that must not be listened to for they will destroy the sheepfold.

We live in a world of many voices shouting at us, straining for our loyalty. There are offers of drugs, guns, more money, more prestige, more success. Buy the car that is made of love! Keep out those who are different! Don't keep giving to those who are poor, it makes them lazy! Many voices, many voices that are wrong.

These are the voices that pull us down and away from the Shepherd. These are the voices that separate us. These are the kind of voices that the leaders of the synagogue listened to when they became jealous and violent when they saw how Paul and Barnabas attracted so many who came to believe in the word of God. Because of that separation, the Gentiles were included in the flock. They were given the word of God and means of salvation.

Jesus' words are not about a me/Thou relationship. They are about all those who listen and follow Jesus. It's not a cute story like "Mary had a little lamb", not about one shepherd and one sheep. Jesus has a sheep herd who He gives eternal life to because they follow Him. No one can take them away. These are not

people who live for themselves, but who are in loving, forgiving, caring relationships with others. Pope Francis: “A committed relationship with God at the same time commits us to serving others...learning to find Jesus in the faces of others, in their voices, in their pleas.” (The Joy of the Gospel)

What happens when we really listen? If we really listen to someone, we will start sounding like that person. One of our sisters came from Hoboken, NJ, and when she taught Kindergarten in upstate NY, all the children started sounding like they were from Hoboken. When we listen to someone, it also affects our vision; we may begin to see as they see. This is how we begin to merge into the multitude that has followed Jesus since that 1<sup>st</sup> C. This is how we become a part of the “immense crowd from every nation, tribe, people and language who stand before the Lamb” as our reading from Revelations describes.

Our work is to create unity wherever we go. If we are not creating unity, we are part of the problem and we certainly are not children of God. We can come to mass as much as we want and come to communion as often as we can. But we are not in communion, the radical communion we are called to follow Jesus into as He proclaims, “the Father and I are One.” To live this unity is to overcome our racism, our classism, our sexism, greed, and all of our desires to make other groups inferior to ourselves.

A person like Andrea Crouch was one who listened and brought many others with him to the true Shepherd. Andrea made fifteen albums and won seven Grammys. Among them are musical scores for *The Lion King* and *The Color Purple*. He had no musical training and could never sight read music. He had to overcome stuttering and struggles with dyslexia. His mother, father and brother all died within two years. At age eleven, he gave his heart to Jesus. From that time on, he used his voice to praise the Lord. We know him as a great writer and singer of Gospel music such as “Soon and Very Soon.” He worked to shepherd addicted teens back to health and to the Lord. He tells of how people walked out of his early concerts because of his color, but he never gave up. He was at one time almost at rock bottomed, but out of his struggle he wrote the song: “Through It All.”

“Through it all, I thank God for mountains,

I thank God for valleys

I thank God for the storms He’s brought me through.

For if I’d never had a problem

I wouldn’t know that God could solve them

I wouldn’t know what faith in God could do.

Through it all, I’ve learned to trust in Jesus,

I’ve learned to trust in God

Through it all, through it all, I’ve learned to depend on His word.

We can depend on our shepherd who can teach us to depend on one another.

Together, with the Shepherd, we will forever be.