

## 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter - John 10:27-30

A man in an Armani suit, Versace shoes, and the latest Polarized sunglasses emerges from his shiny silver Porche 911, approaches a shepherd guarding his flock, and proposes a wager: "Will you give me one of your sheep, if I can tell you the exact number in this flock?"

The shepherd accepts. "973," says the man. The shepherd, astonished at the accuracy, says, "I'm a man of my word; take the sheep you have won." The man picks a 'sheep' and begins to walk away.

"Wait," cries the shepherd, "Let me have a chance to get even. Will you return my animal if I tell what your job is?" "Sure," replies the man. "You are an economist for a government think tank," says the shepherd.

"Amazing!" responds the man, "How did you deduce that?" "Well," says the shepherd, *"you drove into my field uninvited. You asked me to pay **you** for information I already know, answered questions I haven't asked, and you know nothing about my business. Now put down my dog; it is not a sheep."*

***"My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me."***

Jesus uses this shepherding image in today's gospel to describe His relationship with us. If He is the shepherd, then we must be the ones who recognize His voice and follow Him. But what does it mean to recognize the voice of Jesus?

There is more than poetry here. Christians believe that at times in our life Christ speaks to us, calls to us, asks us to do something quite specific. What Christ asks us to do can be both dramatic and life changing.

Here is an example: The Roberts family, a suburban family from Atlanta. A number of years ago Charles, the father, was driving with his fourteen-year-old son, Rick, through the downtown section of the city.

They stopped at a traffic light. Rick, looking out of the window, saw a man on the sidewalk holding a sign: “Homeless, please help!”

At the same time he saw a man in a luxurious Lexus waiting with them at the traffic light. He said to his father, “You know dad, if that man in the Lexus had a little less nice car, the man on the sidewalk could have a meal.”

Charles thought for a moment about his son’s comment and then said, “You know Rick, if **we** had a little less nice car, that man could have a meal.”

That interchange between father and son set the Robert’s family on a spiritual journey, a journey that they have recounted in a book entitled, The Power of Half.

It is called The Power of Half because after a considerable number of months of family discussion, the Robert’s decided that they did not need as big a house as they had. They agreed to sell their house and give **half** of the proceeds away.

Now they had a big house, six thousand square feet, and the market was better for housing in those days. They down sized and were able to give \$800,000 to a hunger effort in the African country of Ghana.

Why half? Charles Robert’s would say that half is measurable. So many times we run into a situation of real need and we say to ourselves, “I should do something.”

But “something” is vague, and vagueness means that often we often end up doing nothing at all. But half is a precise metric. It is a standard that can push us into action.

The other advantage of half is that it is not connected to size. It does not have to be half of your house like it was for the Robert’s. It could be half of a pay-check or half of an evening out or half of an unexpected gift.

What was important for the Robert’s was their conclusion that Christ was asking them to do something. By doing it, they were indicating that they belonged to the Good Shepherd.

Now, I share this example with you, not because I am recommending that you give half of something away—although if you decide to do that it could be wonderful.

I only want to offer a concrete example of someone who heard the voice of Christ speaking in the circumstances of their own life and chose to follow it.

If you and I have a real relationship with Jesus, we should not be surprised if occasionally Christ asks us to do something.

It could be giving money to the poor. It might be reconciling with an enemy. It might be spending more time with the family.

Christ can speak to us in so many ways. But if we come to church every Sunday, if we pray, if we call ourselves Christians and we never hear Christ asking us to do anything, something is wrong.

And it is unlikely that we hear nothing because Christ is not speaking. It is much more likely that we are not **listening**. Not listening is a serious flaw, because if Christ is truly our shepherd, he is calling.

So, the important question for each of us here today is what is Christ calling me to do? What is Christ asking me to do? It is a question that is essential to our relationship, because we cannot follow him if we do not recognize his voice.

***“My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me.”***