

Fr. Tim Ralston – Homily for May 15th, 2011

“The sheep follow Him because they recognize His voice.” Words from this morning’s Gospel. Sheep will follow the voice of the one they recognize as their Shepherd. It follows from this that Christians should, then, follow the voice of the one we recognize as our Shepherd, namely, Jesus. This seems pretty obvious. If we call ourselves Christians, we should be striving to follow Christ.

But in order to follow Him, we must first know be able to hear and to recognize His voice. This isn’t always easy for us. We live in our world constantly filled with noise and with various voices all competing for our attention, and all trying to gain influence over our lives and our decision-making. These voices are not always audible, but they do communicate to us.

Whether it’s the billboards and commercials we see trying to get us to buy a particular product or watch a certain TV show. Or the pseudo-celebrity trying to raise awareness about his or her personal cause or favorite charity. Maybe it’s the voice of the politicians trying to say the correct words that will get them elected. Whatever or whoever it is, we are constantly bombarded with these various voices, and even if we’re not aware of it, these voices often do gain some influence in the choices we make.

So, in the midst of all this noise and all these voices, how can we be expected to hear and to recognize the voice of Christ? Is His voice always the loudest, making it easy to distinguish from the others? Not at all. In fact, we know that God often speaks in the “still, small voice” while the loudness of this world tries to drown Him out. So, then, how do we find the voice of Jesus?

As I said, this isn’t always easy for us. And for this reason, God has given us ways that are trustworthy and true to find His voice. These ways provide the places for us to always turn to hear the voice of God in our lives. One of these ways is through God’s revelation of Himself to His people, namely the Scriptures. God speaks to us through His Holy Word found in the Bible. As we read the Bible, or when we hear it here at Mass, we need to realize that we are not reading or hearing just another book written by a great writer. We are hearing the voice of God Himself, speaking to His children, speaking to us. So, by taking the time to study, pray with and listen to the Scriptures, we are able to come to know Jesus better, and thus, recognize His voice more clearly.

Another way that God has given us to find His voice is through the Church. Jesus founded His Church upon earth and promised that the Holy Spirit would always be with her to guide her. Therefore, we know that if we listen to the Church, we will find ourselves on the right path, instead of wandering off following the voices of strangers.

And we see an example of this in our first reading from the Acts of the Apostles. In this passage, Peter, our first Pope, stands up with the other Apostles, and preaches to the people gathered. Peter is speaking as the visible head of the Church. When he speaks, though, he is not merely speaking for himself, but, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is the messenger of God. That is why his words here are so powerful that they cut to the heart of the people listening and 3,000 people were baptized that day. The people knew that by following the voice of the Church, they were following the voice of God Himself.

One other way that we have been given, through which we can hear the voice of God, is our conscience. However, we need to be careful with this. Our conscience is not simply our personal opinion on what we think is right or wrong. Rather, our conscience must be well-formed according to what we’ve already discussed – God’s divine revelation in Scripture and through the teachings of the Church – namely, the Pope and the bishops in union with him. We must allow the Scriptures and the Church’s Magisterium to shape and mold our conscience so that it truly becomes the voice of God for us, helping us to do the good and avoid the evil. For this is why God has given each of us a conscience, so that we may properly form it and allow it to be another trustworthy guide in our lives.

So, then, we see that God has definitely provided us sure means of hearing and recognizing His voice, even in the midst of this noisy world. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is calling to His sheep and bidding us to follow Him. It’s up to us then to listen and obey. To listen to Sacred Scripture; to listen to our Holy Mother Church; to listen to our well-formed conscience; and then to follow where Jesus is leading us. If we do this, then, we will surely have the life that Jesus gives, and will have it more abundantly.