

Homily for Fourth Sunday of Easter based on John 10: 11-18

- Can you think of something that really amazes you? Maybe a new invention or a certain event? I can think of two. How about those “flash drives”. A storage device the size of your finger that holds hundreds of data files. How does that happen? How can they all fit in there? The second thing that comes to mind is even more amazing, the birth of a child. Life begins as microscopic cells and they grow into a beautiful life in the image of God. I’ve witnessed the birth of each of my three children – each time I stood in amazement. What amazes you?
- In our second reading today, Saint John delivers an amazing message to his second century audience. He tells them they are ***children of God***. While this may not sound shocking to us, in John’s time people viewed God as far off, a distant and judgmental God: detached from their lives. But St. John introduced them to a new truth – God is our Father, we are His children.
- God loves us, thinks about us, cares about us. He is close by and intimately involved in our lives. And one day we will see God face to face. This amazed the people of St. John’s day. Made them say: Wow, how can this be? And it changed the way they saw themselves and those around them. It changed the way they related to God – God was really approachable.
- Our Gospel reading today gives us a closer look at what it means to be a child of God. We here Jesus tell those gathered around Him that He is the “Good Shepard”. With these words Jesus was saying He loves them, cares for them, know them better than any one else knows them – He would protect and even give His life for them.
- For those listeners it was a life changing moment. The Savior, the promised messiah was here!
- On this 4th Sunday of Easter our scriptures remind us these messages spoken centuries ago are meant for us too. And we should receive them with the same life changing amazement and never let them become so ordinary or routine that we loose the amazement.
- And to keep this amazement constantly alive in our hearts, I suggest we look closely at one particular sentence from today’s

Gospel reading and really think about what it means for our own personal life. This is the sentence: “*I am the Good Shepard, and I know mine and mine know me.*”

- “***I am the Good Shepard...***” If we lived in Jesus time the image of a Shepard would have a very powerful meaning for us. In ancient Israel sheep were raised for wool and milk. Sheep remained for many years in the company of their shepherd, who knew each one and named them. The shepherd was their owner, he loved and cared for the sheep. He was responsible for their well-being. When Jesus refers to Himself as a shepherd, He is speaking in tremendously affectionate terms about His love and concerns for us.
- (The sentence continues) “***... and I know mine...***” Here is an amazing thought: in the vastness of the whole of creation, Jesus knows you and me. He thinks about us. Isn’t it amazing? There are so many of us, how does He keep track?
- He knows what we like. He knows our dislikes (He knows I hate asparagus!). He knows our strengths and our weaknesses. He knows our fears, our worries, what we are hoping for....
- He knows that thing you are dreading; that medical test or another day of prolonged illness...
- He know your worries about the kids, about getting or keeping that job, about paying the bills...
- He knows the temptations, sometimes the addictions we struggle with...
- He knows when someone has hurt you, particularly someone you love...
- He knows those moments of great joy and happiness in your life.
- He knows everything about us and wants *us* to know He is here for us, close by. Here to comfort us, to guide us, to give us strength and to share in our joys. He knows us like no one else does. He loves us fiercely. If we remind ourselves of this each day, we will never stop being amazed.
- The last part of that Gospel sentence presents us with an expectation and a challenge as Jesus finishes the sentence with these words: “***... and mine know me.***”

- If we really belong to Jesus, He expects us to know Him. Just the way a sheep knows the voice of its shepherd and listens for that voice and trusts that voice and follows that voice.
- This part of the sentence challenges us to stop and ask ourselves: “Do I really know Jesus, the way He expects me to know Him?”
- Do we recognize His voice and listen for it?
- The sheep knew the voice of their own shepherd, ignored all the other voices calling out and would follow only *their own shepherd’s voice* when they were called.
- We live in a society where everyone competes for our attention. You can’t turn on your television, computer or radio without hearing a voice trying to sell us something or tell us what we need to do or believe.
- We hear many voices in our world like the jumbled noise in a crowded room.
- Some voices call us to desire power or things.
- Some voices call us to fear others, fear what the future holds.
- Some voices call us to indifference and to disregard the value of human life.
- But we must listen carefully for that *familiar voice*, the voice of our shepherd, Jesus. In today’s world it takes a conscious effort to do this. To take the time to shut out those other voices so we can listen to Him. If we don’t, it is easy to lose touch with Him.
- Here’s the amazing thing. If we really try we can hear that familiar voice in so many ways. In our prayers; in our reading of scripture; in our sacraments and in the love of those around us. If we listen for that familiar voice it is there.
- And that voice is telling us the very same message it spoke to those early Christians: Trust in me; do not be afraid; nothing can harm you or take you from me; follow my teachings; love each other; I will be with you to strengthen you along the way.
- This is where our true joy can be found. The Lord’s voice leads to a much different kind of life. Money, possessions, positions of power won’t own us.
- Jesus voice calls us to live simple, peaceful lives; helping each other, putting the love of Jesus and His teachings above all else. Not always life without some pain and struggle; but life always anchored in the knowledge of the Lord’s presence with us; the

knowledge that nothing could snatch us out of God's hand; and life anchored in the promise of eternal life. Doesn't it feel great to know that? Knowing that is knowing Him.

- It's said that sheep may not be the smartest of creatures, but they are wise enough to know they need their shepherd and wise enough to recognize his voice. Let us pray for this same wisdom. Amen.