

## Homily for 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter Yr C 2016- Deacon Paul

*'The sheep that belong to me listen to my voice, I know them and they follow me.'*

1. Many years ago I worked in the marketing department of a company in Zimbabwe as a product manager. There were four of us product managers and we had this amazing secretary who managed the office and did all our paper work- in those days people were very dependent on secretaries. Because one was always on the road in this kind of job sometimes we would dictate on tape for the secretary to replay and type out whilst listening through ear phones plugged into her ears. The instructions were not always very clear, some of them were more like whispers but over time Patricia got so used to our voices that she could figure out the messages.

We were a close team and she got to know us so well that sometimes just from listening to our voices she was the kind of person who could tell whether you were having a bad day or not, she had become that attentive.

2. We all appreciate people who listen to us giving us their full attention. We **appreciate even more** those people who are able to pick up the signals we send out even when we are not speaking. These are the people who, because they know us so well, are attuned to the various non-verbal ways that we communicate- someone who says to you 'what's the matter' just from looking at you.

The gospel of John which we reflect upon in the season of Easter suggests that Jesus had this ability of this deeper kind of communication and had this intimate knowledge of people. More than once St John states that Jesus knew the thoughts of people around him **'...he needed no one to testify about anyone for he himself knew what was in everyone.'**

In our reading today Jesus speaking of his followers says **'I know them'** suggesting an intimate knowledge of his disciples.

3. Today the Lord who knows and understands us invites us to listen to him in the same way he listens to us **'the sheep that belong to me listen to my voice, I know them and they follow me.'** To hear the voice of Jesus in the midst of all the noise that surrounds us is our challenge today. We are being called to be people who set aside time for prayer and to be attentive to the inspirations that Jesus places on our hearts. This is prayerful listening, not just saying prayers but shutting out everything as Patricia did by wearing those earphones and making ourselves totally present to God in silent prayer.

Just think about a couple who have been happily married for many years. When they are together very often they don't need to say much, a silent dialogue happens which is a result of a deep communion and knowledge and understanding of each other. In that silence they are attentive and totally present to each other.

4. Today is Vocations Sunday. It's a day when we reflect on how the Lord may be calling us to serve in the Church. Vocations Sunday could be called 'listening Sunday'

because we can only follow the Shepherd's call if we are attentive. The gospel tells us that we are called by name so our vocation is personal, some will be called to share their love in marriage or single persons, others as priests, deacons, religious or as lay ministers.

The Lord calls us according to our gifts but very often he will surprise us - just think about the call of Peter we heard last week, here was someone who was far from being perfect and yet the Lord still gave him the very challenging role of being the leader of the Church.

5. It can be quite challenging to respond to the Lord's call, very often it involves sacrifice on our part but when we say 'yes' we experience great fulfilment - this has been my own experience- and if we remain faithful to our vocation or calling we can expect a great reward at the end of our lives. Jesus says '**.I give them eternal life, they will never be lost.**' Our second reading for the book of Revelation gives us that glorious image of heaven where the saints and martyrs are gathered around the throne of God holding palm branches. But why palms ?

Palm branches symbolise victory but there is another story behind them. When the Israelites were on their journey to the promised land they built temporary shelters in the desert with branches of trees and palms. Future generations would celebrate the **feast of tabernacles** which was a very joyous occasion when everyone waved a palm branch- just imagine the sight ! It was a reminder of the simplicity and joy of living intimately with God in the wilderness being guided by His voice into the promised land.

6. That should be our pattern too as we journey to our true homeland, to live simple lives shutting out the excessive noise around us and to listen to the Shepherd's whispers drawing us into a life-giving relationship leading us to eternal happiness with God and His saints. Today let us pray for a renewed commitment to personal prayer for a personal relationship with the Lord and when we remain faithful to our calling we too will join the company saints holding palms of victory...Amen.