

Homily: May 8, 2022

By Fr. Virgil Petermeier, osc

We continue to celebrate Easter, which is celebrating an even closer union between God, Jesus and each one of us. Jesus is no longer one physical human being, but a Risen Spirit capable, in God his father, to be united to each one of us simultaneously. That unified characteristic fits well today with celebrating Jesus as the Good Shepherd. A good shepherd is very connected and concerned with each one of his sheep just like most mothers are connected with and concern about their children. So Easter spirit—Good Shepherd—and Mother’s Day really fit well together. We know that we aren’t always connected well with one another, including sometimes, our own children. So we come to God who is our really GOOD SHEPHERD. We call out, “Lord, have mercy.”

The Good Shepherd says, “My sheep hear my voice. . . . No one can take them out of my hand.” Yes, we were created by God, who created us according to his image. That’s the basis for Jesus saying, “My sheep hear my voice.” That means that the most deep-down and original voice in us is God’s. Deep down inside us, we usually can hear what is best for us. That is God’s voice.

We can HEAR God’s voice, but we don’t always LISTEN and OBEY God’s voice. Even when we do not listen nor obey God’s voice, the Good Shepherd does not let us go. God always stays with us. Prophet Isaiah says, (49:15) “Even if a mother forgets her child, I will never forget you.” Or as St. Paul says to the Romans (8:39), “Absolutely nothing can separate us from the love of God . . .” All these comforting expressions sound similar to what the Risen Jesus told his apostles, just before he ascended into heaven. “I will be with you always, until the end of time.” (Mat 28:20b)

However, once in a while we meet someone, who is suffering the death of a loved one, experiencing an illness, or deep loneliness, or an elderly person whose joints all ache, hearing and sight are waning. Such an elderly woman may say, “I think God has forgotten me.” In our human experience, it may seem so, but in our deepest belief, we know that God is not absent. There still is love within and around such a person.

We are all called to be good shepherds for one another. That statement prompts me to think of my niece Tamber. Three years ago she found out that the baby in her womb had an open spine. She told me, Uncle Virgil, this is not what I was hoping for, but I believe God has something good planned for us. I told her that her belief inspired me.

Her little son, my grandnephew, was born with a successfully closed spine due to an operation on him IN THE WOMB. But then, they discovered he was missing most of his ribs on his left side, which hindered adequate breathing, so from birth he had to be on oxygen. Recently they implanted some long synthetic vertical ribs. He is three. He can't walk due to a malformed leg. But my niece, her husband and five-year-old daughter shower him with love to the point he is growing up to be a happy and smiley child.

I continue to feel inspired by other mothers and fathers who have graciously accepted their handicapped children –whether physically or mentally challenged. Usually it was a difficult acceptance at first. But I have often seen how God usually molds these parents into people who have a unique perspective and depth about life. Sometimes I have heard such parents say, “This child has been such a blessing for our family, and for so many others.” One parent described how their child has the practice of greeting complete strangers in the grocery store in a very simple manner, which usually prompts a smile.

On this fourth Sunday of Easter, Good Shepherd Sunday and Mother's Day, The Risen Christ is inviting us to follow his good shepherding characteristics. He also calls us to pray for those families where, for various reasons, mothers and/or fathers have not yet been able to be good shepherds for their children. May they come to believe in and connect with the goodness of THE Good Shepherd, which lies deep within them, until they do become Good Shepherds for their children.