



May 8, 2022

Fourth Sunday of Easter/Mothers' Day

*"My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me.
I give them eternal life. John 10:27*



Dear Friends,

The image Jesus gives us today is of sheep and shepherd. It is an image that speaks of relationship. The only way that the sheep know the shepherd is the shepherd is imprinted on their psyches. Unlike the hired hand the shepherd spends day and night with the flock. I read somewhere that the sheep will touch their noses to the person of the shepherd to acknowledge the connection that they share. People who care for cats and dogs have similar experiences of connection.

Jesus takes this experience and uses it to speak of our relationship with God. God present in Jesus is the Good Shepherd. God took flesh in Jesus so that God could be fully one with us knowing us from the inside out. Relationship is what defines us as humans. We are social animals. We only can truly know ourselves through the loving eyes of others. In isolation we become despondent and depressed. We feel incomplete. This has been born out in the isolation that was caused by our trying to contain the Corona Virus. We don't do well on our own.

Today, we also celebrate another important image God found in mothers. The earliest known images that we have of the divine are of the Mother, not an anorexic Barbie doll, but as the buxom birther of All. This too is an image that speaks of relationships. Archeologists and scholars discovered that these bare-breasted images were used in sacred sites that are found throughout the Mediterranean World.

It makes sense that the first images of God would be feminine. The first human experience of the divine is in the warm and nurturing environment of our mother's womb. And for the first part of our life, we are given sustenance at the breast of our mother. Scientists tell us that while we are in the womb, we are affected by what is affecting our mother. The fetus can eventually hear their mother's voice.

There are forces at work in our world that challenge our humanity. The first challenge is radical individualism. This ideology believes each of us is a lone actor in the world. We are not responsible for or to anyone else. This depressing view was summarized by Margaret Thatcher who said, *"There is no such thing as society."*

This radicalized individualism sees everyone in competition with everyone else for a limited number of goods. It sees things only from the standpoint of economics. We measure everything by the monetary. We know the price of everything and the value of nothing. We don't believe in cooperation as a solution. We mistrust cooperative efforts as attempts to take things away from us. Everyone else is a threat. We treat others and the rest of creation as only valuable when they serve us.

The unrestrained use of technology is tearing society apart. We no longer listen to others of differing viewpoints. We retreat to our self-serving echo chambers. More and more our thoughts and behavior are more influenced by a tech company's algorithms than personal interactions with in-the-flesh people. We are no longer in control of technology it is in control of us. This is poisoning our relationships, it is undermining democracy, destroying the ecology, and creating toxic ideologies that seek to impose themselves over everyone else.

Today we proclaim relationship with others is where we are at our best—in families, communities, organizations, and in harmony with the ecology of our planet. What will save us is not competition but cooperation. We are a society not an economy. As Pope Francis has emphasized, we must stand in solidarity with each other, walking together and listening to all. Let us first seek face to face encounters rather than the substitute of cell phones and social media. Let us never forget that we are real experiences not virtual ones.

Let us hear the voice of the Good Shepherd that looks upon us only with a merciful love that transcends death itself!

Christ is Risen!

Fr Ron

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