

**“ . . . the sheep hear his voice . . . he walks ahead of them,
and the sheep follow him.”** John 10:3–5 and 10:27

Why is it, in so many areas of life, that we become so convinced that we know what’s best? Why do some of us have such a hard time taking advice, direction, or constructive criticism from others? Why do we almost always prefer the laid-back employers, cool parents, and uncomplicated relationships?

It seems that “intellectually” we understand the need to sometimes listen to what others have to say and to heed their guidance. But in practice, our attitude often becomes the opposite— especially in our relationship with God.

Today, we gather on what is commonly called Good Shepherd Sunday. And each year on this day, we hear about the importance of listening to God’s voice and following where God leads. And in theory, I would argue that every single one of us would agree that’s a good thing.

I often say that listening is an art. We are all great artisans of speech—whether outspoken and personable or soft-spoken and shy, we all have an inner preacher who constantly narrates our thoughts, opinions, and daily lives.

To speak is in our nature, and to listen is also a part of who we are. Speaking, however, often seems easier than listening.

In a previous parish, I had to confront a member of the parish staff about something I'd been told about her. But rather than going in aggressively, I simply asked her for her side of the story and listened.

It turned out the situation was much more complicated than I'd been led to believe. I was therefore so relieved I'd taken the time to hear her side of the story first. If I had accused her outright, I would have made the situation 10 times worse.

The ability to really listen to another is a skill that must be learned, and to listen attentively and compassionately so the person feels valued and safe to share what's in their heart is truly an art.

Jesus was an amazing listener. He listened to others' needs and allowed people to express their fears, worries, and concerns in a way that set them free from emotional bondage. Jesus showed us that listening is a virtue and essential to pastoral ministry.

We wouldn't be here if we didn't want to place our lives in God's hands, listen to God's voice, and let God lead us to where we need to go.

Imagine what a difference we can make if we, like Jesus, would just take the time to listen to each other, and thereby allow the voice of the Holy Spirit to inspire us to see, to know, and to hear what he is guiding us to do.

Listening to God is essential for cultivating a deeper, personal relationship with Him, fostering spiritual growth, and gaining wisdom for daily decisions.

By adopting practices such as silent prayer, seeking mercy, and performing acts of service, believers can move from head to heart by seeking an intentional relationship with the Lord.

The focus is on embracing God's guidance for true flourishing and radical love rather than resisting it out of a need for personal comfort.

We often think that as Christians our first responsibility is to make God “happy”. Rather, it is God who wants us to be happy.

He doesn't invite us to a certain way of living in order to meet some need within himself. God asks us to listen to his voice precisely so that our needs and the needs of the whole world can be met, so that we can flourish in ways we can't even imagine.

But this will not happen if we aren't willing to embrace profound mercy, boundless generosity, and radical love.

In other words, it can't happen unless we are absolutely willing to accept that God truly wills what is best for each of us.

God is speaking all the time, but how many of us are not listening because we don't like what we hear?