

Fourth Sunday of Easter
Mother's Day
5/12/19
Cycle C

The sound of my mother's voice could quickly correct my posture. Her voice triggered an immediate examination of conscience. It could make lima beans suddenly edible or, at least more preferable to the alternative. Her voice could instantly change the channel on the TV or lower the volume on the radio.

Even after I was ordained a priest, her voice could clear the calendar. I remember her telling me once that when my aunt asked to see me, my mother told her that I was very busy. Many of you will know this was a coded message. The real message was: "Get home right now."

Her voice could also make failure or defeat just a momentary set-back. Her voice turned the "A" on a test into an Olympic Gold medal.

When I call now home, she might say something like, I was just thinking of you. Such is the power of maternal telepathy, even more potent than fiber optic cables or a 5G network. My calling was not of my own accord; I was doing what I was told.

There is nothing magical or mystical about a mother's voice. It is plainly yet powerfully ordinary, the result of familiarity. A mother's voice echoes around us in the womb. Her tears and cries greet us the moment we are born. A mother's voice becomes a part of ourselves, part of our identity. Even when we are confused or distracted a mother voice can bring us back, center us in who we are before the successes, failures, disappointments, triumphs, mistakes, and surprises of life. We are the son or daughter of our mother.

This is an important reminder as we celebrate this mother's day. It is also a useful metaphor as we listen to the words of Jesus in the gospel today. "My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me." Hearing and recognizing the voice of the Good Shepherd is neither magical or mystical as well. It is a matter of familiarity. With time and experience we become attentive and sensitive to his voice. His voice should not be a stranger to us. Even when we may be surprised that the Lord comes to us, familiarity still helps us to we know the Lord's voice. This saving familiarity only comes through learned habits and practiced personal rituals.

Morning offering: Each day may bring with it a sense of anticipation or trepidation. Either the things to do or the people we will meet can bring a range of emotions. A review of each day can give us pause to consider these things and people in the company of the Lord Jesus. We can ask Jesus to shepherd us through the day.

Grace before meals: Take a moment to ask the Lord to join us at the table. Grace before meals is not just for special occasions; it is for every occasion with family, friends or even alone when we sit down to eat. Before we nourish our bodies, take a moment to nourish the soul.

Religious art or images not only bring to mind the face of Jesus, the Blessed Mother Mary, or the saints; they become mirrors with which we remind ourselves of who we are. We are part of a great

company of companions, a communion of saints. These can be helpful when we are distressed, confused, distracted or lost. We remember to whom we belong, whose company we share.

The rosary: I took an Uber from my home to the Sacramento airport this afternoon. A got a cheerful driver. A rosary hung from his rear view mirror. I asked him about it. He said it was a gift. Somewhat embarrassed he explained that he did not believe it had any power that he could easily throw it away as easily as it was given to him. I suggested that he might give it to someone else as a gift. He claimed he would not do that. It had too much sentimental value to him. Obviously, the best place for a rosary to be is not the rear view mirror but in the hand. It's true power is as an instrument of prayer.

Friday fast or abstinence: Why limit these healthy, holy habits to Lent? Weekly fasting and abstinence become reminders to simplify our lives, thinking less of ourselves and learning generosity of others. This personal ritual of solidarity with the Lord Jesus on the day he died for us, helps make the crucified Christ more familiar to us.

Examination of Conscience: As we begin the day with a morning offering, ending the day with an examination of conscience provides a moment to review the Lord Jesus all that transpired during the day. Who did the Lord bring to me? How did I respond? What blessings did the Lord offer me? Maybe there were occasions of grace that we did not recognize. An evening reflection brings an opportunity to savor the Lord's graces, give him thanks, and ask pardon for our sins.

Reciting the Our Father: The Lord's prayer is just that, Jesus' prayer to the Father that he shared with us. Whenever we take the words of the Our Father to heart and bring them to our lips, we are saying the words that were in the heart and on the lips of Jesus. Letting his words resonate in us, the Lord becomes more a part of our lives as he has already chosen us to share in his life with the Father.

None of these practices may seem extraordinarily powerful. The power is when these rituals become ordinary. They are ordinary in the way they can bring a sense of order to our days and help make the Lord more familiar to us. It also helps to see ourselves as the disciples of the Lord Jesus. With time, it becomes the way we see ourselves ordinarily. With time and practice, these simple rituals become habitual, helping us to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd more clearly, more nearly, and more dearly.