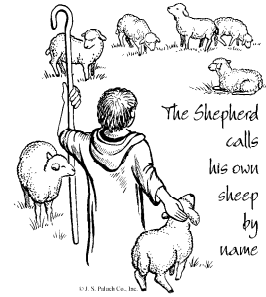


**4<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY EASTER (A) APRIL 13, 2008**

**ACTS 2:14A-36-41 1 PETER 2:20B-25**

**JOHN 10:1-10**

**Fr. Vince Alagia, SJ**



**What's my name? What's your name? What's in a name that makes it special to you, to me? The readings for today do more than just touch on the subject. *Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."***

**In the Gospel we are reminded of the relationship every shepherd has with its sheep: *the shepherd calls his own sheep by name... and... he walks ahead of them, and the sheep follow him, because they recognize his voice.***

**We value having a personal name and we are touched when someone addresses us by that name. Right from the beginning of this homily, I am embarrassed to admit difficulty in recalling names, unless I am with the person on some kind of regular basis. Meeting a lot of people all the time is perhaps a reason for not remembering names as well as I might. And there are some people who never forget a name once spoken.**

**Think about your own name, whether your family name or your first name. Your family name carries with it a richness uniquely yours. It is one of the great treasures each of us has. Who would we be without a sense of our family history and connections, like it or not? All of us have some skeletons in our**

family closet. Every family has a goofy relative who can totally embarrass us in public. The fact remains that family is a precious gift in our lives.

What about our first name, our given name? Not the cute name which someone gave us that may have stuck with us. Is there a family who does not labor over picking just the right first name for their child? It has to mean something special for this special human being. It may be that name has that special meaning and carries an inherent word of blessing for you. Perhaps you carry the name of a cherished grandfather/grandmother. Even if your name was chosen because it sounded nice to your parents, the fact remains that your name was given to make you feel special. Though thousands may have the same name as you, yours is still special and unique to you. You and I are made to feel special from the time on a birthday our name was scrolled in icing on top of the cake. It was special when the teacher took attendance at the beginning of class. It's a name whispered by your true love or your grandchild that makes your heart leap. How wonderful after a long trip to be greeted at home by your name!

Jesus knows about the power of a name. He uses a metaphor chosen from the practice of shepherds in Palestine. In the first century, and I understand even to this day, shepherds allowed their flocks to roam in open countryside during the day feeding on the grasses and plants wherever they could find them. Unlike the cowboys of the Old West in America, the shepherd did not drive his sheep, or push them or wrangle them along any special path as one might a herd of cattle. At night, however, the shepherd would

gather them into a safe enclosed pen for protection. In shepherding, the sheep were named which means that each animal was treated special and unique. The sheep know their shepherd, and trust the shepherd. So all the shepherd has to do is call the sheep by name, and they follow his voice. No whips, no barking dogs, and the like need to fill the air around the sheep.

Drawing on this analogy, Jesus said that his relationship with his followers is like a good shepherds' relationship with his sheep. We are his sheep. Jesus knows our name, that is, he knows everything about us and celebrates our uniqueness. We recognize his voice because we have learned to trust him in his care of us. He seeks our best interest and watches over us while we sleep.

These words were recorded in the Gospel story as told by St. John before the death and resurrection of Christ. In retelling it in this post-resurrection time, we can see just how it is played out. In the first appearance of the risen Lord to Mary Magdalene in the garden near the empty tomb, she did not recognize who Jesus was even though he was standing right there in front of her. She mistook him for some kind of gardener or worker in the cemetery. Then he spoke her name, and she knew immediately it was her Jesus! At the sound of her name, Mary, the scales fell from her eyes. As Jesus said, *"The sheep hear the voice of their shepherd as he calls, and the sheep follow him because they recognize his voice."*

Similarly the final scene in John's Gospel issues a call to Simon Peter to trust the future to Jesus, and simply to obey by doing one thing, the command by the risen Lord, "Follow me." Again, all a

sheep has to do in order to be safe and to be fed is discern the shepherd's voice and follow. It is interesting that the final words recorded by the Lord are simply that, *"Follow me."*

Is it as simple as that for us? Do we hear the Lord saying to us: Follow me? Do we want to hear it? *The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.* (Ps 23). This is a consoling Psalm to one who wants to hear the Lord speak.

Let us conclude with this prayer to our Good Shepherd:

Jesus, may all that is you flow into me.

May your body and blood be my food and drink.

May your passion be my strength and life.

Jesus, with you by my side enough has been given.

May the shelter I seek be the shadow of your cross.

Let me not run from the love which you offer.

But hold me safe from the forces of evil.

On each of my dyings shed your light and your love.

When, with your saints, I may praise you forever. Amen.