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The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. I bet most of you could say this psalm by heart. This is such a comforting thought to know that the one who is in charge is the Good Shepherd, and that if we follow his way, if we follow his lead, if we follow his voice, we will be safe no matter what. Of course, if by "safe" we mean that we will be always happy, successful, healthy, maybe even rich and powerful, we will be sorely disappointed. We all know by experience that life is not always easy. Problems, failures, trials, pain and suffering, are unavoidable. The Good Shepherd himself suffered and died a gruesome death as Peter reminded us in the second reading. The Good Shepherd brings us so much more than human success, human accomplishment. The Good shepherd brings us what we all desire in the deepest part of our heart: the possibility to see, feel, and experience the presence of the divine. The Good shepherd brings us life, abundant life here and now, even when we are facing troubles, fear, rejection, poverty, or injustice. The Good Shepherd is always at our sides, the one who is taking care of us when we fall, when we sin, when we are desperate or alone. *The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.* I shall not because this Shepherd is the only one who can fulfill our heart's desires. That reminds me of this quote from St Augustine: "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you." This is what the Good Shepherd brings to our souls: rest and peace.

The Shepherd leads us and guides us, gently, lovingly, patiently. But how does he guide us? In John, Jesus says that his sheep follow Him because they know his voice, and He knows his sheep by name. That tells us something about the amazing closeness of the Shepherd with his sheep. He knows us, intimately, perfectly, and still, he loves us unconditionally. It's always amazing to me that the Lord loves each one of us, as we are, unconditionally. I don't know for you, but I know for myself how limited and small I feel at times. I wish I would be better. I wish I would do better. I wish I could pray longer. I wish I would be more spiritual, smarter. I wish I knew the Bible better. I'm aware that I'm only a frail human being, with all my limitations and shortcomings. And yet, God loves me. God loves you. The Good Shepherd loves you and guides you.

How do we know the Good Shepherd's voice? How can we be sure that what we hear or discern is his voice? That's always a challenge! Some people told me they heard Jesus' voice. Many told me they never heard anything... However, Jesus makes it pretty clear that his followers know his voice. It's why we need times of silence, times of prayer, times for studying the Bible, times for praying with the Gospels... And times when we gather together as a community, where together we can hear the Word proclaimed to us. Today, as it has been since more than 2000 years, the Lord is still speaking to us through the Bible read, proclaimed, and preached. The Good Shepherd speaks to us through the sacraments of the church. He also speaks to us through the circumstances and the events of our lives. He speaks to us through those we encounter. And, as I have said in the past, he might speak to you through people who are not even aware of it. But he does speak to us! Not necessarily with words, but with the language of God which is love. A language spoken to our hearts and minds, which brings joy, peace, comfort. A language that makes our hearts burn. Jesus said that his sheep know his voice and follow him. We know his voice, not the timber of his voice, but his voice, nonetheless. A voice calling each one of us by our name, guiding us, patiently and lovingly.

Because the Good Shepherd is talking to our hearts rather than to our ears, we need time to discern and hear this discreet voice. When we have the chance to look back to our lives, to the choices we made, the experiences we had, often we are amazed to realize that the Shepherd has been present to our lives, loving us and guiding us. I remember this 80-year-old man who was about to be

baptized, he shared with the congregation that he was born and raised in an atheist family and lived most of his life without knowing Jesus. But he recognized that Christ had always been present at his sides, even though he was not aware of it. He was guided, lead, by the inward voice of Christ, and was then ready to be baptized.

Some people have the grace to hear Christ speaking to them, I know some persons who had this spiritual experience. I confess that I never heard Jesus' voice. I did not hear words spoken to me from the Lord. But I know that He really talked to me. I know that he has been guiding me. I know that without His guidance and loving patience I would not be here today, in this church, in this country. I said in the past that I never heard the Lord's voice, except when my bishop called me by my name, in the name of Christ, when I was ordained a priest. And I answered yes with all my heart. It was 30 years ago, on the 29th of April 1990, surrounded by my family, my friends, and the people I had served as seminarian and deacon for the past three years in my field ed parish. It was a beautiful and moving day. But I came to realize that I made an incorrect statement when I said I never heard Christ's voice. True, I never heard the voice of Jesus telling me with real words, "I call you to be a priest." But the truth is that he had been calling me since I was 11, and maybe before. The truth is that I did all I could not to listen to this voice because I was scared. I did all that was in my power not to listen to the motions of the Spirit gently whispering to my heart. When I became a young man, and the calling became more precise through prayer, I was pretty good to find all the good reasons not only to disregard this calling, but also to find good excuses: I'm not smart enough, I'm not good enough, I don't know enough, I'm too shy, and so on. It took me time, and discernment, to realize that the joy I felt when I was praying, the excitement in my heart when I was reading testimonies of people entering a monastery or a seminary, were ways for Jesus to talk to me, to guide me and to lead me. It took me time to realize that he had been at my sides, preparing me through my different choices. Actually, it took me 14 years to eventually say yes and then go to seminary. 14 years of struggle, denial, and excuses. But 14 years during which the Lord was preparing my heart. And one day I surrendered to His will. I did not hear anything, but I still remember very clearly the night I said yes. Suddenly it was obvious, my heart was burning in me, like the disciples of Emmaus. I realized that he had been speaking to me in the secret of my heart. The strangest thing is that all my good reasons and excuses to say no were still present, I did not become better, smarter, more spiritual when I said yes to the Lord. I knew that I was not called to serve the church because I deserved it, I knew I was not called to serve the church because I had all the quality to do it, I knew I was not called to be a priest because I was better than others, I just knew that Christ called me to love and serve him by loving and serving his church, and that he would give me what I needed to accomplish whatever was going to come. Did I have doubts? Certainly, but my love of Jesus and my trust in Him were so strong that I feared nothing. I knew that with Jesus' help I would be able to serve him. It's hard to believe that it was 30 years ago, in another country, in another denomination.

Today my heart is full of joy and gratitude. I want, I need, to give thanks to the Lord for these 30 years of priesthood, with their ups and their downs. The words of the psalmist are mine today, and I hope they can be yours too. *The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want. He leads me besides still waters, he revives my soul and guides me along right pathways for his Name's sake. My cup is running over. Surely your goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.*" Amen!