

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER (Year C)

May 10, 2019

Acts 13:14, 43–52 • Revelation 7:9, 14b–17 • John 10:27–30

I.

Easter is the great season of sacraments:

Baptisms, Confirmations, First Holy Communions, and ordinations.

Last week, I administered First Holy Communion to my godson in northern VA; two days later, I attended my niece's Confirmation in Chapel Hill, NC.

These events got me thinking about a teaching of Vatican Council II:

“The purpose of the sacraments is to sanctify men,
to build up the Body of Christ and, finally, to give worship to God. ...
[The sacraments] not only presuppose faith,
but by words and objects they also nourish, strengthen, and express it.
That is why they are called ‘sacraments of *faith*’”
(*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 59; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1123).

II.

Faith is the human response to God's action (Revelation).

The grace of God moves someone to have faith,
to respond generously to what God has done and is doing.

Grace always comes first; God takes the initiative.

But there must also be a human response made freely;
otherwise we would be robots.

God's grace can be resisted or even rejected.

Authentic and mature faith involves the commitment of the whole person to God
—technically, the intellect and the will—
and not just a part of oneself.

III.

Today's readings provide both a vision and voice to which we respond in faith.

We heard in the Second Reading:

“I, John, had a vision of a great multitude,
 which no one could count,
 from every nation, race, people, and tongue.
 They stood before the throne and before the Lamb,
 wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands.”

It's a vision of heaven, our ultimate destiny:

“They stand before God's throne
 and worship him day and night in his temple.”

In other words,
 our worship of God at Mass, our involvement with the Church,
 is not just a part of our lives.

God is the purpose of our lives.

Now there's something startling about this heavenly vision:

“The Lamb who is in the center of the throne
 will shepherd them.”

The Lamb—Christ—is also the shepherd.

He leads by serving;
 he opens heaven by being the sacrificial Lamb.

This passage from the Book of Revelation, provides the vision;
 today's Gospel, drawn from the Good Shepherd Discourse in John,
 provides the voice:

“My sheep hear my voice;
 I know them and they follow me;
 and they shall never perish.
 No one can take them out of my hand.”

Christ knows us and we hear him.

These words—knowing and hearing—
point to the relationship we're meant to have with the Son of God.

Pope St. Gregory the Great (540–604 A.D.),
who is featured in both the sanctuary mural and in the stained-glass windows,
explains the meaning of this passage:

*“I know my own—by which I mean, I love them—and my own know me.
In plain words: those who love me are willing to follow me,
for anyone who does not love the truth has not yet come to know it.”*

Love of God is not static;
it is dynamic, and it's meant to deepen over time,
just as married love is to grow stronger through the years.

Here's my thought for this week:

Faith in God, and love for Jesus Christ,
deepen when we strive to “see” and to “hear”—vision and voice—in a new way.

Concretely, the “seeing” is being immersed in the Word of God:
reading it and applying it to our lives.

To better “hear” the voice of the Good Shepherd,
prayerful silence is a great friend.

I recommend that we begin our daily prayer with five minutes of silence.

And that we come to Mass early in order to have some silence to prepare.

When we “see” and “hear” in this way,
we open ourselves to God's grace,
and we can respond more generously to God's action in our lives.

Then, over time, God's promises will come to fulfillment in us.

III.

“[The sacraments] not only presuppose faith,
but ... they also nourish, strengthen, and express it.”

For three weekends in a row, we'll be having infant Baptisms in the parish.

Next week, the children of the parish will make their First Holy Communion.

And on the final day of Easter, Pentecost Sunday,
the teenagers of the parish will receive the Sacrament of Confirmation.

These events are special moments not only for those receiving sacraments,
but also for the entire community.

These sacramental celebrations strengthen our faith
as we witness the effect they have in people's lives.

It's a vision for the Church
that enables us to see how God works
and how lives are transformed.

The young people receiving these sacraments also give voice to our prayers,
because their “Amen” is a response to the call of Christ—
the Good Shepherd who leads all of us to holiness.