

Mothers, Fathers Primary Vocation: Helping us Hear the Voice of the Shepherd

Over the years a question I've been asked a time or two is "when did you decide you wanted to become a priest?" For some there may be a specific moment in time where they remember the moment they found their vocation. But for others, like me, it was gradual, but a big reason was because I was able to hear the call of God.

In the Gospel for this weekend on the Fourth Sunday of Easter, Jesus says "My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me." Hearing the voice of the Shepherd though takes an attentive ear. Much like a master organist can play a piece and find a flaw that most people would not even notice because they have a trained ear, the same is true for our faith. How does one hear the voice of God, who guides us with the love of a shepherd, as the primary voice we must listen to if we want to become saints?

A big part of it has to do with our parents.

On the day of our baptism, a lighted candle is given to our parents lit from the Easter Candle. The priest or deacon then instructs the parents that this candle, symbolizing the light of Christ, is entrusted to them, and it's up to them to teach their children how to keep that spiritual flame in their souls burning brightly.

This week as we celebrate Mother's Day, and I reflected on the Gospel, I couldn't help but think of how my parents have both helped me in my life to hear the voice of the Shepherd.

For one, there is that commandment to love God with your whole heart, mind and soul and to love your neighbor as yourself. In both of their lives, I've seen this lived out.

Mom and dad centered the family life around God. We'd make sure to go to Mass each week, and if we were super busy on a weekend, we'd drive to at the time the only "last chance" Mass in town, Saint Lawrence near the U of M for a Sunday evening Mass. We'd pray too before meals and before I went to bed. They also helped me to learn the content of the faith, teaching me the faith and morals of our Christian faith.

But then there was the testament of their lives. Both of my parents are sacrificial people. They are involved in their parish. They have done so much for their own parents. They worked hard to make our house a home. And they were always present for both me and my sister when we were growing up. To this day, they continue to amaze me in how they give, give and give never saying "what's in it for me" but living much like John the Baptist, pointing the way to the Shepherd.

A man I've quoted many times in this space and in homilies is Bishop Robert Barron, who heads up "Word On Fire," a Catholic apologetics site and is auxiliary Bishop of Los Angeles. He says time and time again how God cannot be one of many things, but must be at the center of our lives. That's so important, but so too is it important for us to teach others what that means.

As we age, many of us see how our moms and dads truly help us to hear the voice of the shepherd. We look back and see how hard they worked, and why they had to say “no” to certain things that we didn’t understand at the time, and of why prayer and Mass mattered so much whether it was Easter or a weekend in July. Our moms and dad do so much to form us.

All of us are prone to spiritual “hearing loss” though. We get busy and lose sight of what ultimately matters and get caught up with school, work, sports etc. Sometimes even us priests, and parents, though well-intended, can get caught up in this too.

Our Gospel this week challenges us to hear the voice of the Shepherd who will ultimately lead us to heaven. If we may struggle with that sometime, we can hit the “reset” button and remember what ultimately matters. But we can also look at the example of our moms and grandmothers and so many people and see in all that they have done for us in so many ways they were helping us to hear God’s voice.

To all our moms, thank you for being such amazing, unsung heroes who pass on the faith and help us to hear the voice of God through how you lead your lives. May God bless you always - and hopefully you know how much you are loved not just one day a year, but every day of the year.

God bless,

Fr. Paul