

**OUR LADY STAR OF THE SEA WEYMOUTH
HOMILY FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER
25th APRIL 2010**

Jesus said: “The sheep that belong to me listen to my voice.”

Our gospel today, as always on the fourth Sunday of Easter, presents Jesus as the shepherd and ourselves as his sheep.

We belong to him as sheep belong to a shepherd.

Most people want to belong. It’s a basic human need. Many people still belong to families, but not all are so lucky. Some turn to friends, peer groups or clubs, some to the internet. Christians have our Lord Jesus.

We are the luckiest because, as Jesus says, no one will ever steal us from him. He is always there for us. We are safe with him. He satisfies our desire to belong.

But, as we know, people do drift away from him. As we look around our church we can think of people we have not seen for a long time. They seem to be lost, but they may not be completely lost. They can still belong to our Lord, but they are lost to his Church.

This appears to contradict Jesus’ saying, “no one will ever steal them from me.”

It does not contradict because Jesus makes belonging to him conditional. We have to listen to his voice. If we do not listen to his voice we may be lost, just as sheep get lost in darkness and fog when they stop listening to the voice of their shepherd.

Jesus said: “no one will ever steal them from me”

That’s not saying they will never get lost. If we do not listen to him we may get lost. Jesus will not reject us but we may lose him by drifting away from him. If we want to belong we have to listen to his voice.

Listening implies a voice to listen to.

Our Lord’s voice speaks to us in prayer, in the scriptures and through his Church. Prayer and scripture are important for our personal relationship with Jesus but they can be individual, solitary activities. They do not give us the full sense of belonging.

On our own we can lose our way in tiredness or depression just as sheep lose their way in darkness or fog. If prayer becomes difficult we can stop hearing the voice of Jesus our shepherd. We get lost.

Jesus speaks to us through his Church. The Church is something that we can always relate to because it is a physical presence. It is made up of people, like us, trying to follow our Lord Jesus. We need each other. We belong to each other in spirit. The Church makes real the sense of belonging.

Today, as always on the fourth Sunday of Easter, the bishops of England and Wales ask us to think and pray about vocations. A vocation is literally a call, a call from Jesus our Shepherd. If we belong to him we listen to his voice, we hear his call. He calls all of us to follow him, to love and encourage each other, to help each other to feel that we really belong to him in his universal Church.

Sometimes he calls people to do something special to makes this belonging possible. In our Catholic tradition only bishops, priests and deacons are authorised to speak the word of the Lord in the homily at Mass. Our bishops are asking single men to think whether they could perform this essential task as priests or deacons, and married men whether they could do so as deacons.

For the moment women still have to look for other ways of helping God's people to belong. Let's pray that we may all listen to the voice of the Lord and hear his call to us; that nothing and no one will ever steal us from him.

Rev Geoff Carey