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Today we are on the Good Shepherd Sunday and that is because the third reading of this fourth Sunday of Easter, that is the Gospel (fourth reading if one includes the psalm) comes from chapter 10 in the Gospel according from John, the story of the good shepherd. We have different passages every Sunday, depending of the year: in year A (today's case) we read from verse 1 to 10, in the year B, verse 11 to 18 and in the year C, from verse 27 to verse 30.

When I was 14 years old, I had to live with my grand-father. He was a great man. He had some cows and I would spend much time feeding them and doing funny faces in front of them. They would look at me and probably wonder if I was okay. I was actually bored and had to spend time with someone or something, so I chose to play with the cattle. My grandfather was the only one who could milk them. They knew him very well. He would sing for them from far and they would recognize his voice and show it by doing some noise which sounded like humming. Someday my grandfather would go to visit his friends and I would stay at home. I many times tried to imitate his voice and sing his songs to the cows and I would go to check on them. Not only they would not make the noise but I would find them asleep. Maybe I should have invested in lullabies-for-cows career: putting cows to sleep. In a few words, they knew my grandfather's voice and they completely ignored my voice.

As I mentioned in the beginning, today's gospel is from verses 1 to 10 of the tenth chapter of the Gospel, which means that it follows directly the story of the man born blind. This might imply that Jesus is saying something about the Pharisees who, throughout that story, are challenging the messianic character of Jesus. They mislead the people and they are ready to do anything to go against him that they would even overlook obvious signs like the healing of the blind man. Their worries are not about the sheep; just like the robbers in today's gospel.

Well, maybe that is a stretch of mind but I thought about the previous chapter. Coming to the text itself:



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First of all, as my theological interests are in Christian-Muslim dialogue studies, I tried to find something about the Good shepherd in the Qur'an to make comparisons but I guess I did not have enough time to find similar stories. The only thing I managed to find was that the Prophet Muhammad was once a shepherd to his uncle Abu Talib's flock, when the latter became poor.

The Good Shepherd is the one who leads the flock out of the sheepfold, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice: **We all recognize the voice of our mothers, our fathers, brothers and sisters, and we learn to recognize the voices of our friends if we stay long enough with them... by voices here I include the look, the body language, the silence...**

The same is said in the today's gospel about the sheep that recognize the voice of their master. The sheep in Israel were animals that had a great value. They, with the goats, were the wealth of lower middle class Israelites. That is mostly because they could survive in a country without much vegetation. They could be easily moved to another region according to seasons. The sheep used also to give (they actually still do) their wool to make clothes with. There were long and joyful festivals when they would be shearing them (the only image of that that I have is from the famous series "The Thorn birds", or "les oiseaux se cachent pour mourir" as I watched it in French... but that was in Australia, not in Israel).

Coming back to the voice of the shepherd, today being the Good Shepherd's Sunday, in many churches around the world they made this Sunday a vocations' Sunday. What other appropriate moment to talk about people's calling...?

Now, in Rwandan parishes, it is the moment when they see religious orders because the diocesan priests – most parishes are run by the diocesan clergy- invite those nuns, brothers and sisters, and some lay people in Church ministry, after the communion and they talk to congregations. What strikes me a lot is that usually they are supposed to



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talk about their orders, their mottos, and their activities in the countries where they live and work. However most of them end up talking about their personal life's stories. Which means a lot: the meaning of God's calling at some particular moment of our lives.

Every time I tried to tell candidates my life story, a brother would whisper in my ear: do you want these young people to join us?

The thing that bothers me when I reflect on today's gospel and the message it wants to have about Jesus and his work, especially his work through us all: to what extent do we have to be the channel of the voice of the Good Shepherd to those who need it and hardly find references towards it?

When I studied in England I was surprised by the number of young people, basically teenagers and young adults, who were attracted to reactionary Catholicism. I was coming from South Africa, a country where the struggle against apartheid brought together all churches, all religious traditions and conflicts between churches are not a huge problem there... they all know that they have a role to play in people's social life.

So, when I got in the UK and had the experience I mentioned above, I dared to ask to one youth about it (he was actually a classmate) and I was surprised by the answer: "our parents grew up in the times of liberty and they assumed we can figure everything out by experience. There is no guidance. They have left us to our fate and we learn much from the internet." So, when all that is on the internet pushes you in the arms of reactionary groups through their websites and other appealing means...

Since then, I've had this difficult question on my mind: how do we become the channels of the voice of the Good Shepherd without becoming judgmental or conveying our personal agendas disguised as the Good Shepherd's voice? Especially, how do we do that to younger generations that still need to learn from the voices of those they have known from their youth, not the internet or some other TV programs? Do we have a moral duty to try as much as we can to be the channels of the Good Shepherd?

Gustave Ineza, O.P.