

4th Sunday of Easter - 2019

Think about the ways that you have come to know things. There is a myriad of possibilities. We learn to tie our shoes by tying our shoes—usually with someone there looking on and correcting us if we miss a step in the process.

We learn how to be a parent by thinking about how our parents did things, maybe by reading up on this or that aspect of the task, but in large measure we learn it on-the-job.

Some things we simply learn by reading. Facts, mostly, but also insights from wiser ones who know how to impart their wisdom.

The learning offered to us in today's gospel is a particular kind of learning that we might overlook. Maybe we can call it learning by association, or learning by imitation.

I suppose it takes a while for a lamb to learn to follow the shepherd's voice, but since the lamb's mother is doing it, and doing it consistently, the lamb really has no option but to learn to do likewise until that point when it follows the shepherd's voice even when the mother is no longer there.

There's a lot to be said for this type of learning. It's almost primordial. It gets in our bones, and becomes the deepest knowledge we know.

Jesus says that following him is the way to know him. It's not an intellectual knowing. It's incarnational knowing. It's knowing that comes from doing as Jesus does.

One of the common issues that people talk to their priest about is the feeling that they are not praying enough, or not making God a more important part of their life.

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Most of us could probably admit to that—that we would do well to focus on our relationship with God more. The problem can be discovering how to do that.

I think Jesus provides us with the answer in today's gospel. Following Jesus, doing as he does, will automatically bring us closer to him, even when that means that we will see more clearly the gap between us and him that still remains.

Living for others, which is the example Jesus gives us, is like that. It brings hardship with it. But there is also a lot of consolation in recognizing that the hardship it entails is not something God does not know anything about. Nor does he leave us alone to deal with it as best we can. He's with us in the midst of it, accompanying us and pointing the way forward.

Doing as Jesus does is a doorway to sharing in Jesus' life. Following Jesus includes the assurance he has given us that no one can take his sheep from him. It's the very God of the universe who has given them to him.

This is not really about how powerful God is so much as how loving God is. Doing the work of following Jesus leads us to come to understand how he loves us and how that following leads to sharing in his own life—beginning now and on into eternity.

This is not book learning, but life learning. It comes from the doing and not just from the thinking about doing. Knowing through following. When we do that we discover what it means to truly be children of God.