

4th Sunday of Easter (Mother's Day 2022) – Deacon Fraser McLaren

-“Jesus said: ‘My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me.’”

-When I was in the seminary, one of my professors told us about a time when he was travelling around the rural parts of southern Europe. And one day he was visiting a small town when he saw two shepherds walking down a street in conversation. And behind them were their flock of sheep all intermingled and mixed up.

-When it came time for the shepherds to go their separate ways, my professor was curious to see how the shepherds would disentangle their flocks.

-Well, you can probably guess what happened. All the shepherds had to do was turn to their flock and make a calling sound with their voice and the sheep instinctively turned and followed their shepherd. What was before a mass of jumbled up sheep, quickly turned into two flocks following their respective shepherds.

-We're all sheep. We all follow the voice of a shepherd of one kind or another. Someone or something that guides our lives and actions. If the voice we follow isn't God's, then it's some other voice we follow, because we all follow the voice of some sort of shepherd. If that voice does not belong to God, then very likely it is some variation of the four classic substitutes for God:

wealth, pleasure, power or honour. If God is not our shepherd, then these will be our shepherds, the voices we follow in life.

-And where do these false shepherds lead us? In our pursuit of more and more of that which we hope will give us happiness, they lead us to frustration, addictions, discord in our lives and in the lives of the people around us - to an absence of peace, always to an absence of peace.

-On an international level they lead whole nations into conflict and even war. These are the pastures we can expect to live in when something less than God becomes our guide and model in life.

-When we try, when we try to reject the false and shallow shepherds of wealth, pleasure, power and honour, then we can begin to hear the voice of the true shepherd. This is a lesson that every generation and every individual must learn and relearn for itself: that our hearts were not made for the passing things of this world, but for the eternal - the divine.

-And if we were to sum up God in one word, if we were to identify the essential quality of the divine nature: it'd be love, God's love for us. When we love, we are close to God and when we are close to God there is joy and there is peace.

-Without love wealth, pleasure, power and honour always leaves the heart cold. The human heart was made to love and to be loved, that's why we follow the shepherd who loves us, the shepherd who laid down His life for His sheep.

-Today is Mothers' Day. It's a day to celebrate that love which makes life joyful and gives us a glimpse of God's love for us. It's a day to celebrate all the love and sacrifices made by mothers, grandmothers, foster mothers, step mothers, godmothers and adopted mothers.

-We know that motherhood is much more than a physical relationship it's a loving, nurturing, self-giving relationship and in that way all women can be mothers, even when sometimes the demands of motherhood, in whatever form it takes, can leave you drained.

-I'll end with this Mothers' Day greeting written by Megan Hunter-Kilmer an American missionary. Slightly modified for context, she writes:

-Happy Mother's Day to all physical mothers (biological and adoptive) and to all spiritual mothers too.

-Happy Mother's Day to grandmothers and aunts and neighbors who become mothers, to family and friends who support the mothers in their lives.

-Happy Mother's Day to mothers who've lost children, to mothers who haven't yet begotten children, to mothers who ache over their empty arms and mothers whose arms sometimes seem too full.

-Happy Mother's Day to mothers estranged from their children and to children missing their mothers.

-Happy Mother's Day to single mothers and married mothers, to working mothers and stay-at-home mothers, to mothers who have it all together and mothers who need a break.

-Happy Mother's Day to religious Sisters and nuns and consecrated women too who have borne no children but are mothers just the same.

-Happy Mother's Day to teachers who become mothers, to women wise beyond their years who mother their peers and their elders.

-Happy Mother's Day to the Mother of all mothers – the BVM. May God bless us all with hearts like hers, open to being broken for love of our children, ready to suffer selflessly that the world might know Love.

-If you are a woman, you are a mother. Happy Mother's Day to you all.