April 17, 2016
Fourth Sunday in Easter –
“Living our journey on earth as a vocation from God and not a vacation away from God”
Deacon Dave Snyder

Reading 1  Acts 13:14, 43-52

Paul and Barnabas continued on from Perga and reached Antioch in Pisidia. On the sabbath they entered the synagogue and took their seats. Many Jews and worshipers who were converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who spoke to them and urged them to remain faithful to the grace of God.

On the following sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and with violent abuse contradicted what Paul said. Both Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first, but since you reject it and condemn yourselves as unworthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us, I have made you a light to the Gentiles, that you may be an instrument of salvation to the ends of the earth.”

The Gentiles were delighted when they heard this and glorified the word of the Lord. All who were destined for eternal life came to believe, and the word of the Lord continued to spread through the whole region. The Jews, however, incited the women of prominence who were worshipers and the leading men of the city, stirred up a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their territory. So they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them, and went to Iconium. The disciples were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.

Reading 2  Rev 7:9, 14B-17

I, John, had a vision of a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation, race, people, and tongue. They stood before the throne and before the Lamb, wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands.

Then one of the elders said to me, “These are the ones who have survived the time of great distress; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

“For this reason they stand before God’s throne and worship him day and night in his temple. The one who sits on the throne will shelter them. They will not hunger or thirst anymore, nor will the sun or any heat strike them. For the Lamb who is in the center of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to springs of life-giving water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

Gospel  John 10:27-30

Jesus said: “My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. No one can take them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one can take them out of the Father’s hand. The Father and I are one.”

HOMILY

When I was growing up, the oldest of 6 and in a very small “village” 30 miles north of the Big Apple, my siblings and I would tend to wander all around the neighborhood to play with our friends. When it was mealtime, we would hear this voice in the distance, sometimes the equivalent of blocks away, that would begin with a “Yoo-hoo,” and then there would be another one, and before my mom started with the litany of names that included each of us, everybody around knew who it was, what time it was, and why the Snyder kids were being called. My brothers, sister and I heard her voice, and knew it was time to follow it. And … we knew what would happen if we didn’t.”
As Catholic Christians, we just heard in our Gospel passage, and we believe Jesus when He says to us, “My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish.” Eternal life – forever, not just our time on earth. Eternal life with our Lord and Savior, Jesus, who resides in heavenly glory with God, our Father. But, in our secular world, we are conditioned to think otherwise, aren’t we. We’re conditioned to think about the here and now, to live our lives on earth for the here and now, to put eternity off into some remote recess of the mind. We’re told by many voices that we are only alive after we are born … some say even later than that … and that our life is essentially over when we can’t thoroughly enjoy it any more, whatever that means. But Our Lord offers eternal life, if we listen, and follow. God needs to be an important part of our lives on earth, not hidden away. Elsewhere in John, Chapter 10, we’re told that Jesus calls each of us, by name. Our calling, our vocation during our time on earth, is to do something with our lives – to follow Him and help others follow Him. Let’s put it another way – we need to live our journey on earth as a vocation … from God … and not … a vacation … away from God.

Now before your mind starts drifting off towards vacation time, I’d like you to focus on your vocation for a few minutes – your vocation from God, how God fits into each of your lives, whether to be a priest, sister, deacon, married, single. But, including God in our lives is becoming increasingly difficult, isn’t it. If our culture isn’t telling us to ignore God, our Church is getting bad press, or even confusing press, from most places around us. To begin, I learned a new word this past week – how many have ever heard the term “astroturfing?” For those who haven’t, it’s the practice of hiding or masking the true sponsors, the real backers, of a message or organization to make the message appear as though it’s coming from and is supported by regular folks like you and me. But, the message is actually sponsored by large corporations, political interests, “big money” organizations – you get the picture. Why do we care? Because we are influenced by these voices, which have everything to gain by having you believe what they believe, that everybody is believing a certain way, or doing things a certain way, so, gee, why shouldn’t we? Sneaky, isn’t it? And, it’s much more widespread than you might think. As an example – and I’m not trying to make any political statement here – we’ve all probably seen stories or pictures of polar bears, some floating away on a small piece of ice, and their numbers rapidly dwindling each year towards extinction. And if you search the internet, you’ll find all types of stories and evidence from supposed professionals to back that up – and they show-up first on the search engines. However, there are also reputable sources which say there are more polar bears now than in the past several decades. But, you probably don’t hear about that. So, which is true, and what do we believe? The point is that we are influenced by what we hear, and maybe the more we hear something, from astroturfing or any other means, from legitimate sources or not, the more we tend to believe it. Confusing? – You bet! Today is Good Shepherd Sunday, and the Gospel story is about sheep hearing the voice of Jesus, the Good Shepherd. I’m sure we’ve heard stories about how dumb sheep can be, so we tend to believe that. But, scientists are finding that sheep can have the brain power to equal that of rodents, monkeys, and in some tests, humans. They received the term “dumb” mostly because they often fail to act independently of each other, but that neglects the fact that that is actually a survival instinct for protection against predators. It’s really a smart thing for them to do. Confused enough yet? Recent polling suggests that the American people have very low confidence in all three branches of government, and organized anything, including
organized religion. But, we should ask ourselves who is behind the polls and how are the questions being asked. And we should wonder whose voices are often behind the never-ending criticism against the Church and her teachings. Whose voices are we really listening to? Where is Jesus’ voice in all of this? How can we hear Jesus’ voice calling us, when voices are going in the opposite direction and they are loud?

Jesus said, “My sheep hear my voice.” It is His voice that we need to be hearing, and listening to, and following. After all, we are to live our life on earth as … a vocation … from God … and not … a vacation away from God. A couple of hundred years ago, Blaise Pascale, the French scientist and inventor, noted that “There is a God-shaped hole in every human heart that can be filled by God and God alone.” That hole can’t be filled by alcohol, or drugs, or money, or power, or even completely filled by good things, such as great relationships with those we love, but only by a personal and loving relationship with our Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ. And, no matter how much we think we’ve developed in our relationship with Christ, it is an on-going journey, to develop it even more, each and every day, even until our last breath on earth. Mother Angelica, the founder of EWTN who passed away a few weeks ago, requested that the feeding tubes be left in her, that medicine be given to her until the very end, because with each day, “I will have suffered one more day for the love of God … But most of all I will know God better. You cannot measure the value of one new thought about God in your own life.”

The Marines used to have a slogan, “The Marines need a few good men.” We need a slogan, something like, “The Church needs all Christians to hear and to follow the voice of Christ.” ALL CHRISTIANS! So, how do we keep the voice of Jesus going in our lives, how do we help others in that regard, also? How do we know what He is calling each of us, by name, to do with our lives? How do we let others know that we are a Church that should be identified with following the voice of Jesus?

1) We need prayer – how often do we pray each day, especially during quiet times. If you need to find a quiet time or place, consider Eucharistic Adoration, including the Perpetual Adoration program that St. Louis setup about 5 months ago – fill out a card for more information on that – cards at each of the Church entrances, or see me.

2) We need to challenge ourselves and challenge the youngsters – I will often go up to someone, no matter their age, and ask them what they want to do, what they want to be, when they grow up. You’ll get some interesting answers, especially from the youngsters, I guarantee it. Some of my grandchildren suggested a video game tester or designer, a librarian, a botanist, Captain America, a state trooper, and a doctor. Suggestions from other younger ones that I caught before Masses included teacher, astronaut, doctor (again), veterinarian, engineer, painter on walls and ceilings, hockey player and writer. Then, ask them what they think God would want them to be, or to do – you will also get some interesting answers, to a question that’s probably never been asked of them. Answers I received included: somebody who will help others, maybe a firefighter, ambulance person or police officer, a “follower of God,” to be nice, to preach the Word of God, go to a monastery, and just to share love with others. With kids and grandkids, ask them every few months – it’ll get them thinking even more in that direction.

3) We need good press, no, we need great press, so speaking of helping others, many adults and children have been busy with the Corporal Works of Mercy tagboard – almost 300 tags have been taken to date. If you haven’t taken a tag yet, I encourage you to check it out. And, check out the St. Louis website
for two stories of how parish youngsters have taken a tag and followed up to benefit the community – one young lady brought bibles to the county jail and a young fellow brought treats to Lollipop Farm. Do any youngsters, adults or families out there have other stories to share with the parish, based on helping others? Take a tag from the board, do the work of mercy and then send the story in to the parish office.

4) We need to be thinking about our own vocation – what DOES God want each of us to do, to be, for the rest of our days on earth? Besides prayer, get involved – please, get involved with the parish; be a part of a ministry, or a bible study, a support or other parish group. Members of the Knights of Columbus and Youth Group are at the main exit as you leave Church – check them out.

5) Speaking of good press, speak up on behalf of the Church whenever you get the opportunity. The Church is the largest organization in the world in helping others. The Church is the greatest advocate for life issues, for the poor, the refugee, the disadvantaged, the marginalized.

6) Vocations to the priesthood, religious groups and the diaconate are needed, and now more than ever. If you feel you have a calling from God to at least look into this, please do so.

My siblings and I would miss dinner, or worse, if we didn’t pay attention to our mom’s call. What happens if we don’t pay attention to the call of Christ?

Our life on earth is a vocational calling from God – it’s not a vacation away from God. Listen to the voice of Jesus, the Good Shepherd.