

THE GATE KEEPER

Whose voice in life do you find to be a trustworthy voice? A reliable voice? A voice which speaks the truth even when it is hard? And who does this consistently? Enough so that you will seek to hear what that person has to say, even stop what you are doing to listen? Is it the President of our country, depending on your party affiliation? Is it the Pope? Is it a more local political figure? Is it an anchorman or anchor woman on the network channels or Cable television? Is it a particular pundit you admire? A Commentator? Your boss at work or someone else at work? Is it your spouse? Is it your priest?

And who do you believe consistently speaks Our Lord's word to you? Our Lord's truth to you? That's a lot of questions. But they are worth pondering. And—we should be able to answer them. We should know ourselves well enough. Who do we listen to? Who do we not listen to? But there is a corollary set of questions that are also very important but from a completely different perspective. And that is: Who looks to you? Who comes to you for wisdom? For Truth? Who listens to you because they believe your voice is a reliable voice? An authoritative voice? Who regularly seeks your counsel?

All of these questions come to mind from today's Scripture readings. The sheep recognize the voice of the shepherd. It is not only familiar, it can be trusted by the sheep. Who consistently speaks a word to you that can be trusted? That you never have to worry about? Where do you typically hear that voice? When do you typically hear it?

In the gospel for today Jesus is referred to as the Good Shepherd. But He is also called the sheepfold and the gate. I think we get the Good Shepherd image but what about the other two? What is a sheepfold? What purpose does it serve? A sheepfold is a safe, protected place for the sheep where they cannot be attacked, stolen, snatched way or killed. So by calling Christ the sheepfold the evangelist John means that in Christ there is such safety. We often seek safety in this life In Christ we find it.

And Jesus as gate? The sheepfold might be a pen or a cu-de-sac and a gate opening into it. The sheep enter through the gate and then the gate is closed. Sometimes there was an opening into the sheepfold but no gate. In that instance the shepherd would actually lay in the opening after the sheep had entered. No sheep could escape without waking the shepherd. No one could enter without waking the shepherd. By sleeping in the opening the shepherd actually served as a human gate. To get in you had to go through the shepherd. Protector. Safe place. Trusted voice. In this life? There are not a lot of them. If you can find one or two really reliable people like that you are blessed.

Seventeen years ago St. Anthony's found such a Good Shepherd who gathered our sheep in the sheepfold of the parish Children's Faith Formation (CFF) and sometimes she was here so much that it seemed like she slept here. Her name was, and is, Roberta Ortwein, our Director of

Religious Education who is stepping down today. And for all these years she has been a Good Shepherd both to our children but also to their parents and to their families.

On many occasions she has gone after the sheep who had lost their way in life or who had grown confused or angry or disoriented. Sometimes there were people who had lost their way and she helped them get back on track. With Roberta they knew they could always return—child or parent. Her word was always a reliable word, a merciful word, a helpful word. When we sing the hymn All Are Welcome In This Place, I believe that is her legacy for the CFF program she ran. So I take this opportunity, publicly, to thank her, to express our ongoing gratitude for all she did for us, and for all she has been for us. May all the good she had accomplished be a blessing upon her, Rick and her family. Roberta, Thanks for tending the flock, guarding the sheep and being God's voice of truth and mercy all these years.