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*Pastor, St. Michael the Archangel*

*4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter - Year A (May 3, 2020)*

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Most of us are familiar with the various talent search TV programs. Programs like *Dancing with the Stars*, *America's Got Talent*, or *The Voice*. In each of these shows, there is a competition which takes place between one (or more than one) person against others for the honor of being named the number one person who is chosen among all others. It takes discernment on the part of the judges to determine who is the best of the best: the best performers; the best dancers; the person with the best singing voice. And the competition can be fierce, and the disappointments can be even difficult to accept.

In our day to day life, there are other types of competitions that occur, whether we recognize them or not. Those competing "voices" come from many sources. These voices are not necessarily new; they have been around since the dawn of creation, since the dawn of man. First of course, is the voice of God, who speaks the "Word" and out of His love, brings everything into being; the voice that pronounces his creation "good," and the crowning glory of His creation, man, as "very good." But soon after, the first competing voice tries to undo His act of love; the voice of the serpent tempts Adam and Eve away from the life of true happiness that they have been given.

Sometimes it would seem that this voice of the serpent, repeated over and over, is still repeated today, calling out with a fierceness that can be very confusing and even sometimes convincing. A voice that seems to say to us that we should follow a different path, a different way to happiness, one that does not include a cross, one that does not encourage virtue and truth, but an "easier way." It can be that this voice disguises itself with an appeal to a good we desire, and a quick way to get it; a pleasure that we seek, and a convincing permission that excuses us from any consequences that may come about; an honor that we may feel we deserve, and one that can be obtained without any moral accountability. It comes from outside ourselves and becomes embedded within us through our past experiences, and once implanted, can hide and remain within us until a time of weakness comes.

Throughout the History of Salvation recorded through Sacred Scripture and Tradition, we are told, that God did not give up on what he made from His generous Love:

We give you praise, Father most Holy, for you are great and you have fashioned all your works in wisdom and in love. You formed man in your own image and entrusted the whole world to his care, so that in serving you alone, the Creator, he might have dominion over all creatures. And when through disobedience he had lost your friendship, you did not abandon him to the domain of death. For you came in mercy to the aid of all, so that those who seek might find you, Time and again you offered them

covenants and through the prophets taught them to look forward to salvation (Eucharistic Prayer IV).

This constant desire of God to bring about the redemption of His creation finds its completion in His son Jesus Christ who “gave himself up to death, and rising from the dead, he destroyed death and restored life (*Ibid*).

In John’s Gospel (John 10:1-11), Jesus calls himself “The Good Shepherd,” the one whom the sheep respond to because “they recognize *his voice*.” “But they will not follow a stranger,” he notes, “they will run away from him, because they do not recognize the voice of strangers.” As stated before, His voice can be drowned out, if we let it, by the voice of serpent. And what is the voice of the serpent? Any voice that tries to take us away from the path of Jesus, the path of the Cross. The voice that says, “you don’t need the Church, you can do it on your own;” The voice that convinces us “You don’t need ‘grace,’ you are a good enough person;” The voice that assures us “It won’t matter what you do, because you are not important;” or , “You can do whatever you want, because you are all that matters.”

How do we find the right way, the way of life that can only be given by God and His son Jesus Christ? We can only find the way when we recognize that He is first in search of us. We can only find the way when we learn to discern His voice and choose to follow. We find it when we understand what he meant when he said, “I came that they might have life, and have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). Through the Word of God and through the Most Holy Sacrament of His Body and Blood; through all the Sacraments and through communal and personal prayer, we are given this Spirit of Discernment and the confidence that only the voice of Christ will lead us to where we ought to be.