

Jesus was fond of using shepherd imagery as he proclaimed the good news.
It was something the people could understand.
Shepherds were a common sight.
Tending flocks of sheep was a year round, every day responsibility.
This is also a carryover from the Old Testament.
Many times we hear that the Lord is the shepherd of his people.

In this morning's gospel Jesus is verbally sparring with Jewish leaders.
Jesus confronts them because after all he has done,
the signs he has worked, they still do not recognize him,
they still don't accept him as coming from the Father in heaven.
They claim to be able to see, but Jesus assures them that they remain blind.

He now tells a story, a riddle, a parable about the true shepherd
who enters the sheepfold by the proper way, by way of the gate.
And then mentions how robbers and thieves avoid using the gate
and try to get to the sheep by climbing over the fence.
This reference to robbers and thieves is directed toward the Jewish leaders
who are considered by Jesus to be false teachers and false prophets.

When it comes to having access to God's people,
who are like sheep gathered in a sheepfold,
Jesus announces that he is the gate of the sheepfold.
Anyone who wants access to God's people has to go through him to get to the sheep.
Jesus verifies the credentials of any shepherd
and he makes it clear that he has not opened the gate for the Jewish leaders to enter the fold.
And the Jewish leaders did not understand
that Jesus was referring to them as robbers and thieves.

Jesus, in a way, was defending those who came to believe in him.
They have come to know and trust his voice.
They would no longer listen to the Pharisees and scribes.
Jesus was there to protect his sheep from being misguided and misled.

We live in a world where there are many voices competing for our attention....
where everyday things seem so removed from what is godly.
When it comes to ways of living it is easy to listen to voices that make everything seem so easy,
so convenient, so comfortable.
We can be misguided and misled by voices that do not belong to the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ.
What we fail to recognize in the moment is that only Jesus Christ
can provide the protection we need from sin and death.
Only he can lead us to the best of pastures in this life and everlasting pastures in the next.

The bottom line: we need to learn to recognize his voice, to hear him calling our name,
and then follow him faithfully.
He will lead us to abundant life.

Today's prayer: "O Lord, open our ears that we may hear Your voice. Help us to love Your Word.
Give us the courage and strength to follow where you lead. Amen!"