

## HE SERVANT



*Luke Anthony  
Nowicki BSG*

*Born Jul 7 1945  
Professed Sep 14 1980  
Died Feb 15 2018*

# #247

*Spring 2018*



*Winter Convocation Eucharist, 2018*

### *The Servant*

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## **WHERE THERE'S A WILL**

You can assist and further the ministries of the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory by remembering the community in your will. If you choose to do so, the following form of wording is appropriate:

*I hereby give, devise, and bequeath to The Brotherhood of Saint Gregory, Inc., a New York State not-for-profit corporation and its successors for ever \$\_\_\_\_\_ and/or \_\_\_\_\_ percent of my estate to be used in such a manner as determined by its Directors.*

## THE HEAVENLY CHOIR

I was very sorry not to be able to attend the funeral liturgy to celebrate the life of our brother Luke Anthony Nowicki. Luke Anthony was, as many of you know, a member of the Brotherhood of Saint Gregory for nearly forty years, and as we will celebrate fifty years as a religious community in The Episcopal Church next year, his time in community is very significant; only two of us, James and myself, have been part of this fellowship for longer than he was.

Luke was a regular email correspondent and nearly always began his letters with the words, "Dearest Family." *We were* his family and we keenly feel the loss of our brother now. Many years ago a sister of the Community of the Holy Spirit told me that the Brotherhood would be truly great when we had a brother in heaven. We have *a baker's dozen* there now, and I know that Luke is gathering them to say the rosary, which was his favorite devotion.



(l to r) Luke Anthony, Richard Thomas Biernacki,  
and James Teets in 1988

As the community gathers at Annual Convocation this summer, we will celebrate Luke's life and time among us. We give thanks to God for his life and witness in this community — among many that he loved and served.

Well done, good and faithful servant — a Servant of the Servants of God.

RTB

*Here and there with the brothers*

## COMMUNITY NOTES

*Brother Luke Anthony Nowicki BSG*

Our beloved brother entered larger life at 5:00 am on February 15th as he slept. He had been beset by physical ailments for quite a few years but his deep faith always sustained him in his vocation, and with his brothers and his parish family. An unexpected diagnosis of pancreatic and liver cancer in January sent him into the



*Luke Anthony in 1985*

hospital and from there to local hospice care less than three days prior to his death.

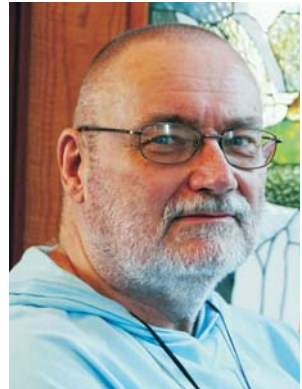
Luke Anthony was always aware of his calling to religious life. Raised in Massachusetts, he had briefly tried his vocation with the Roman Catholic Order of Friars Minor Conventual but his work and training in health care attracted him to the Episcopal Society of Saint Paul, an order that operated a nursing home in Portland, Oregon. While that vocational endeavor did not come to fruition, it provided him with an introduction to the Brotherhood through the late Brother Christian Williams (also trying his vocation with SSP). Both he and Christian were attracted to the BSG concept of life under a common Rule but not in a monastic setting, and he returned to Massachusetts to pursue work as a licensed practical nurse, and as a Gregorian postulant.

Luke Anthony offered his administrative and organizational skills to assist the Brotherhood, first as the Director of Postulants and Novices (1982 through 1983) and then as Director of the Companions Program (1984 through 1985). These were also years of transition for him as he joined the staff of several different hospitals as an LPN, and then pursued the opportunity to enter the insurance field as a claims representative for an insurance company and then as a claims examiner, relocating to Camp Hill, Pennsylvania. He retired from Blue Shield in 1997 after nearly 20 years of service, due to health considerations, and remained in Pennsylvania.

Parish ministry was always a focused interest for Luke Anthony and he was a faithful member of the administrative staff of a number of parishes. He last served at his beloved Mount Calvary Episcopal Church in Camp Hill, where he enjoyed leading Lenten retreats, officiating at the Daily Office and, when his health allowed him, serving as a lector and intercessor.

Since his youth, our brother was blessed with an active spiritual relationship with the Blessed Virgin Mary and with a number of the saints — especially Franciscan saints — and he encouraged that relationship through meditation, contemplation and the recitation of the rosary. For many years, each of the Brotherhood's two annual convocations found Luke Anthony leading a number of his brothers in the nightly rosary in one of the chapels.

Luke Anthony is the most senior Gregorian to pass into eternal life within our community, having



*Luke Anthony in 2017*

lived nearly 38 years under vows among us. Those many years have made quite a difference to us as our beloved order has evolved and matured in God’s caring hands. Luke Anthony was a loving and steady presence who could always be relied upon to give a word of encouragement or direction when necessary. As his correspondence demonstrated, he thought of the Brotherhood and of his individual brothers as his “family,” and indeed we are, in Christ. And now his family mourns his passing, even as we give thanks to our Lord for guiding our Luke Anthony to us so many years ago, for blessing him with the dedication and the courage to live out his vocation lovingly among us, for his presence in making our common journey that much lighter by his laughter, and for his sharing himself and his gifts with each of us. We will miss him at each gathering, even as we lovingly remember him in our prayers and intercessions.

We have enjoyed a great gift over these short years with our dear brother among us and we wish him peace and rest at the last, as we sing through our tears:

The strife is o’er, the battle done;  
The victory of life is won;  
The song of triumph has begun: Alleluia!

*Winter Convocation 2018*



This year’s winter retreat and convocation took place in Wappingers Falls, New York, as the brothers gathered for five days of spiritual and personal refreshment in late January, at Mount Alvernia Retreat Center.

This retreat marked our thirty-third convocation held at Mount Alvernia, our seventeenth winter event there. Every past winter we were warmly welcomed by Fr Roch Ciandella OFM, Retreat Director at Mount Alvernia. His death last May changed that forever. No one can replace Fr Roch with us, but Fr Tom Garone OFM, Guardian of the friary, stepped into his sandals and gave us a similarly warm welcome — and we wish him well in this ministry.

The Brotherhood’s Education Committee, chaired by Director of Education David Luke Henton, developed a varied retreat schedule this winter, presented in



*Angel Gabriel Roque leading a workshop on Latino ministry competency.*



*Teleconferencing from New York to California*

six sessions during our time there. Novice Angel Gabriel Roque presented two sessions on “Latino Ministry Competency,” during which he led the group in discussing a wide variety of ministries. The gathering enjoyed a live video conference with the Rev Canon Anthony Guillén, Missioner for Latino/Hispanic Ministries and Director

of Ethnic Ministries for The Episcopal Church, who spoke to us from his office in Los Angeles and gave a brief presentation of his work followed by a Q&A period, and conversation moderated by Angel Gabriel.

The 1992 film, *Orlando*, occupied two more sessions, a screening and a theological discussion of the film, led by Scott Michael Pomerenk. The film opens in London in 1603, just prior to the death of Queen Elizabeth I and it continues up until the early 1990s as it traces a young man named Orlando who becomes enchanted by the queen and granted eternal youth, though some years later awakening to find himself transformed into a woman. The film involves lost loves, bad luck and lawsuits over whether or not the woman Orlando is entitled to own the property bequeathed to a male Orlando.

Scott Michael presented another film for discussion, titled, “Voices of Witness: Out of the Box.” This short film documents the testimony of transgender people of faith, describing their journeys of self-discovery and transformation, and celebrating the ministries they carry out. The film was produced by Integrity USA. Introduced by Bishop Gene Robinson, it presents three persons of different Christian traditions who have each gone through gender transition and who describe their lives as they underwent these processes.

The final retreat session was a presentation of the talents of five of our



*Ronald Augustine Fox censes the ministers during the feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul (James, Tobias Stanislas, and Gordon John).*



*(l to r) Karekin Madteos, Tobias Stanislas, David Luke, Tommy, and Scott Michael share their talents in a Gregorian performance suite.*

brothers in ways not normally associated with these Gregorians. Titled “Gregorian Offerings,” this session included:

† Karekin Madteos Yarian offered a free verse autobiography about their non-binary Christian journey;



† Tobias Stanislas Haller sang “Lost in the Stars,” the title song from the musical drama by Maxwell Anderson and Kurt Weill concerning the faith journey of a South African Anglican priest during apartheid, accompanied by Richard Edward Helmer on the piano;

† David Luke presented five short poems by Hafez, a 14th century Sufi Persian mystic poet who wrote sensuously of Love — both human and divine;

† Novice Tommy Mandri provided a rousing rendition of the traditional hymn: “Cuan grande es El” (“How Great Thou Art”), accompanied by Enoch John Valentine on the chapel organ; and

† Scott Michael gave us an advance preview of his yet-unproduced short screenplay titled: “Galatea,” based upon the ancient myth of



*Richard Matthias prepares the table.*

Pygmalion, but from Galatea's point of view as a statue of a woman brought to life, molded by the expectations and desires of a man, without her consent.

Daily retreat sessions were set within each day's round of worship, prayer and refreshment as formed by the Daily Office, the Holy Eucharist and ample time for conversation and rest. The masses were celebrated by Tobias Stanislas, Richard Edward and Postulant Richard Nash Smith with the assistance of deacons Edward Munro, Gordon John Stanley and Richard Matthias together with many other members of the community providing lectors, acolytes, oblation bearers, and sacristy staff, headed by John Henry Ernestine and assisted by Scott Michael. As always, fine preaching highlighted each day's mass, as presented this week by Christopher Stephen Jenks,



*James reads a lesson.*

David Luke and Richard Edward, and the daily music schedule was thoughtfully organized by Director of Convocation Liturgy and Music Nathanael Deward Rahm, with himself, Enoch John and Tommy at the organ console.

Every opportunity for our brothers to gather is important to all of us and, while attendance at Winter Convocations is difficult or even impossible for some Gregorian Friars, depending on their secular work schedules, it is always a time of good cheer and catching-up, regularly punctuated with laughter and even a few

tears of joy. We give thanks for these opportunities throughout the year as they serve as our needed "times apart," when we can restore our souls and go back to our many ministries refreshed, reinvigorated and anxious for our next gathering. To God alone the glory!



*Richard Matthias and Joseph Basil assist as Richard Nash gives thanks.*



### Province 1

Christopher Stephen Jenks has joined the staff of the Mid-Coast Recovery Coalition (MCRC) in Camden, Maine, serving as House Manager of a transitional housing facility in nearby Rockland. The facility will offer seven men in recovery from drug and/or alcohol addiction a safe and secure place to live and the time needed for their recovery to take deep root in their lives. The house will be known as The Friends House, at the request of the donors who wish to remain anonymous but who are members of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). He will be working in partnership with treatment professionals, case managers, recovery coaches, and members of 12-step groups and other peer-support programs in the area. The goal is to address the lack of sober and secure housing for men in recovery in the mid-coast region of Maine. For these men, their only other alternative might be to return to the place where their drug use began, with associated high rates of relapse and resuming destructive addictive behaviors. The Friends House will help break their cycle of addiction and find the pathway towards re-joining the community in healthy ways. This is all in accord with the larger mission of the Coalition to provide treatment and support services for people dealing with addiction and related issues.

As regular readers of *The Servant* know, Christopher Stephen served as Executive Director of Fessenden House, a group home for men dealing with substance abuse in Yonkers, New York, for 22 years, and he brings extensive knowledge and experience to this new work as well as a deep commitment to people in recovery. He will be assisted by the staff of the Coalition, including Myles Ouellette, a Certified Alcohol and Substance Abuse Counselor, who will co-manage the residence.

### Province 2

Richard Matthias — serving as a deacon in the Anglican Church of Canada's Diocese of Ottawa — reports that he has received a grant from the diocese to cover tuition at the Parish Ministry Institute, a training program offered by the Canadian church. This two-year course in congregational development focuses on facilitation skills, core models, culture analysis, personality type, organizational power analysis, decision-making in groups and whole systems, organizational change process, interventions, trust development and conflict. This experience will open doors for him as a full partner in pastoral ministry within his newly re-organized deanery and also in his parish.

### Province 3

Members of Province 3 gathered at Mount Calvary Episcopal Church in Camp Hill PA on February 24th to assist with the memorial liturgy for Luke Anthony Nowicki. We were warmly greeted by the parish's Priest-in-Charge, the Rev Dr Gregory Welin, and a number of parishioners of Luke Anthony's long-time home parish. Dr Welin was the chief consecrator of the Holy Eucharist, as Gregorian Friars took other roles in this service, including Tobias Stanislas Haller as

preacher, Minister Provincial Edward Munro as deacon, Sr Susanna Bede Caroselli SSG as lector, James Teets as epistoller, postulant-prospective Christopher Werth as intercessor, and Eric Shelley as acolyte. Both James and Eric assisted as chalicists, and James read a letter of greeting from the Minister General, who was unable to be present.

Following the Commendation, Edward provided the dismissal and the congregation then sang the Brotherhood’s beloved theme-song which Luke Anthony knew so well, Hymn 618 — Ye Watchers and Ye Holy Ones. The retiring procession made its way outside to the lovely memorial garden for the interment of our brother’s mortal remains. May he rest in eternal peace and rise in glory on the last day!

The parish provided a buffet luncheon and everyone had the opportunity to relax and chat with John Nowicki, Luke Anthony’s brother, and to meet many of Luke Anthony’s parish friends who so highly regarded him.

☒ Province 3 held its Lenten retreat at Baltimore’s Saint Mary’s Seminary & University Center for Continuing Formation. The staff were warm and welcoming to the Brotherhood, and the facilities are modern and comfortable. Present at the gathering were Minister Provincial Edward Munro, James Teets, Tobias Stanislas Haller, Eric Shelley and postulant-prospective Chris Werth. Tobias Stanislas organized the two-day time apart: two conferences on portions of Gregory’s Homily 21 (for Easter Day). As is often the case with Gregory’s writings, this long sermon is packed with exegesis of practical themes and the two conference sections were titled as “Reflection on Leadership and Service” and “Reflection on the Resurrection” — both entirely appropriate for this



*Brothers of Province 3 conversed in the sun room at Saint Mary’s Seminary Center for Continuing Formation*

Lenten retreat as we approached the feast of Saint Gregory the Great, followed by Holy Week and Easter. The third conference was a reflection on the Daily Office, focused on the first six verses of Psalm 19. The second day of the retreat concluded with a mass celebrated by Tobias Stanislas and assisted by the brothers present, and everyone departed with thanksgiving for a beneficial time together.

*Province 4*

“The Holy Grill” — a feeding ministry of Mark Andrew Jones’ Saint Nicholas Episcopal Church — was featured in an article in *The Pelican* of Pompano Beach and Northeast Broward County, Florida. The Brotherhood supports this ministry through its Outreach Grants Program.



*Eric Shelley snapped a shot of Tobias Stanislas celebrating the mass in the small Oratory chapel at Saint Mary’s Seminary, at the close of the Lenten retreat.*

*Province 7*

David Luke Henton informed the community that Bishop of the Rio Grande Michael Vono, has invited him to postulancy toward ordination to the priesthood. Our prayers and very best wishes go out to our beloved brother!

*Province 8*

Five of the six brothers of Province 8 gathered for a Lenten retreat at Saint Michael and All Angels’, Tucson, Arizona, where Novice David Benedict Hedges

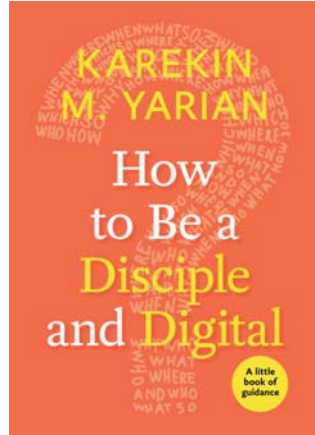


*Brothers enjoyed the desert environs at their Lenten retreat.*

serves as rector. The brothers were treated to the gracious hospitality of Saint Michael’s and also of David Benedict’s family. They visited Saguaro National Park and sampled the fine foods of the desert Southwest. On Saturday, the brothers celebrated the feast of Saint Gregory the Great, and spent a quiet day discussing vocation and religious life, ably facilitated by The Rev Peter Helman, Associate Rector at Saint Philip’s in



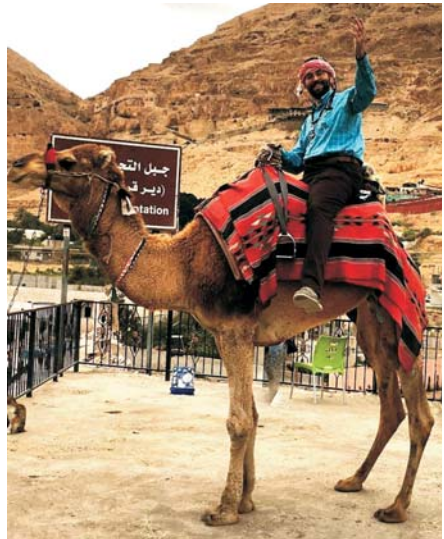
Brothers of Province 8 on retreat



Karekin Madteos' new book

the Hills, Tucson. Thomas Bushnell preached at two masses at Saint Michael and All Angels' on Sunday.

† Karekin Madteos Yarian's *How to be a Disciple and Digital* joins Tobias Stanislas Haller's *What About Sex?* as part of Church Publishing's "Little Books of Guidance" series. These short and pithy paperback books are designed to focus on questions Christians face in the 21st century. Karekin's volume addresses the challenges of social media as both means and obstacle to healthy Christian community life — virtual and face-to-face.



During a recent retreat in the Holy Land, David Benedict took some time to fulfill a less spiritual ambition: riding a camel.

*Sermon for the burial of Luke Anthony*  
Nowicki BSG

## CELEBRATE THE FEAST

*Death has been swallowed up in victory. +*

Anyone who knew Brother Luke Anthony knows that he liked to eat. I knew Luke Anthony for almost forty years, and shared many a meal with him during that time, in many different settings. In part because of this familiarity, I noticed

one of the first signs that he might be dealing with a serious illness late last December. He was with a group of us Gregorians at Lin's Buffet, one of his favorite restaurants. But not only did Luke not make his normal second trip to the buffet, he didn't finish what was on his plate from the first trip. Now, Lin's Buffet was Brother Luke's idea of something close to paradise. Whenever he talked about going there for lunch, he would get a gleam of anticipation in his eye, such as a mystic might when speaking of heaven. And Luke Anthony got that same look in his eye when he spoke of the Holy Eucharist — another feast that meant so much to him. So I am confident that Luke's choice of the Old Testament passage from Isaiah has something to do with a vision of heaven as a bit like Lin's Buffet; as Isaiah says, God's provision of "a feast of rich food" for all peoples, a truly international buffet.

As that passage from Isaiah reveals, Luke was far from the first to associate an abundance of food in rich variety with a vision of paradise. More importantly, Christians have long associated the earthly celebration of the Holy Eucharist with the heavenly banquet. Now some might be tempted to think that bread and wine are insufficient provision for a banquet, providing only a limited buffet hardly worth the name. So it is good to recall the old legend of the Holy Grail and of the knights dedicated to its service: for the Grail was the cup of the Last Supper, and the knights devoted to its service lived entirely and solely on Eucharistic Bread and Wine as their only food and drink, and yet each who partook of those simple elements experienced them, so say the legends, as "whatever food each liked best, containing all variety." In, with, and under those two simple elements of the oblation, an infinity of perfect satisfaction was to be found and tasted.

So it is that simplicity can convey complexity, a



*Luke Anthony, James, and Tobias Stanislas in 1982*



*(l to r) Edward Munro, Susanna Bede Caroselli SSG, and Luke Anthony in 1997*

single promise realize an infinity of fulfillment. In the same way, there is more to Isaiah's vision than merely an abundance of food. This is no ordinary meal, not even an ordinary feast, but a banquet set for a purpose, a feast with a reason. It is a celebration feast, a way to mark and rejoice in deliverance. And as with so much in Isaiah, it is not about deliverance just for the children of Israel, but for all the peoples of the world. It is not merely deliverance from hunger or sorrow or disgrace — though it is that — but deliverance from an old enemy. Isaiah pictures him as a funeral shroud or winding sheet, the old enemy Death, dressed in the tattered old sheet of a Hallowe'en costume. Death is the one whom the Lord God, at his coming, will sweep away and swallow up, whipped out of sight and mind much as a magician might pull the tablecloth away from the dining table in a flash, leaving the banquet standing still and undisturbed.

**D**eath — the thing we feared... the enemy that each of us mourns in others and dreads for ourselves, turns out to be perishable goods. Death itself dies...

As Saint Paul observes, continuing the image deployed by Isaiah, “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” Death — the thing we feared, the thing that led us to weeping and sorrow, the enemy that each of us mourns in others and dreads for ourselves, turns out to be perishable goods. Death itself dies, swallowed up in the victory of life. All of its pretended power and might is swallowed up, to serve as little more than an hors d’oeuvre, a mere appetizer, a first course before the feast of life begins.

That feast of life is spread for us today, as it has been spread for nigh on 2,000 years, beginning in that upper room amidst a band of disciples with their master. It has been celebrated since in every conceivable circumstance and situation. And

it is common to speak of this Eucharistic feast as a foretaste of the heavenly banquet. But I would like to affirm to you today that it is not merely a foretaste or anticipation: it is participation in the heavenly banquet itself, the Real Presence of the Promise. It derives its power as a promise assured by the One who made the promise, and gave the command: “Do this!”

We don't always take him at his word, so he gently reassures us. Look at Jesus gently correcting Martha



when she thinks he is referring to some far off future resurrection of the dead yet to come: He assures her that the resurrection life was — and is — present to all who believe, who though they die, will live, and that life will come to her dead brother in mere minutes. Such are his promises, such his reassurance. And just as the power of the resurrection cuts through time and space and makes its real presence felt not only in the there and then of a distant past or distant future, but in the here and now of every instant in a Christian life, so too the heavenly banquet is not merely set in heaven, but set here and now before us, and before every gathering of Christians when they follow the command, and “do this.” Whether at a simple table set in an upper room, a grand marble altar in a great cathedral, or a cart on wheels at a hospital bedside in intensive care, it isn’t the table that matters, but the meal.

Jesus had shared the table fellowship and graced the home of Mary and Martha and Lazarus many times. He sat at the table in Bethany as starry-eyed Mary listened to his teaching, while practical Martha busied herself with her pots and pans — and Lazarus perhaps looked on with some amusement, though the Gospel gives us no explicit witness. Lazarus would be the first — even before Jesus — to taste the power of the resurrection. But he could not, would not enjoy that resurrection before he had tasted death — any more than Christ himself could pass that first course by.

Death: Lazarus’ death, Luke Anthony’s death, your death, my death, are in this feast and banquet bound together and tied up with the death of Jesus Christ our Lord. He has swallowed up death, as did Lazarus and Luke, as I will and as you will, that piquant palate cleanser before we sit to dine for ever at the feast of resurrection in the heavenly kingdom. But remember — remember as our Lord and Savior bids us do — that our Eucharist today is not just a foretaste of that heavenly banquet. It is participation in the banquet itself. Lazarus and Luke are seated even now — in that timeless Now of God’s good time — seated even now on the other side of the table from us, together with all who have gone before, all our loved ones, all the saints; and all the sinners too, redeemed by the one in whom they put their trust. It is one banquet, however often and wherever it is celebrated, one banquet for our one Lord, in whom we all are one through one baptism: baptized into his death that we may share in his life. Death has been swallowed up in victory. Therefore let us celebrate the feast.+

*Tobias Stanislas Haller*

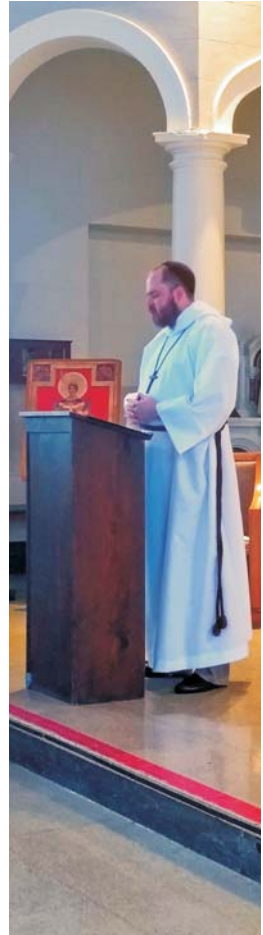
*Thoughts on Holy Week*

## **THE GREATEST GIFT**

Every year, from Maundy Thursday evening through to early on Good Friday, I spend the night and early morning hours at what is called (by me alone) the “Vigil Vigil.” Since my parish is located in a downtown area, we have an electronic door

lock, and someone needs to sit at reception and buzz people in for the vigil overnight. Every year, I volunteer.

Holy Week is my favorite time of year. I think of it as “Christmas holiday season for mature Christians.” I don’t mean to take any significance away from Christmas, which is certainly a blessed and holy time of year; but so much of our culture ties Christmas + Gifts together that, too often, we just get “Christmas Gifts,” and it’s harder to focus on the Christmas *Gift*. Not discounting the Easter Bunny and all of the commercial trappings around Easter, Holy Week doesn’t begin to approach the level of gifting insanity that goes along with Christmas. For adults, Holy Week doesn’t carry the same weight as the days leading up to Christmas do for children — and many adults. We don’t “get” things on Easter as we do on Christmas, and we don’t give things in the same manner. Maybe it’s more accurate to say that it’s “Christmas season for lazy Christians” — thinking only of myself, in that I don’t have to sift through the commercial and societal aspects of Easter, because Holy Week won’t let me forget what it’s really about. The gift we received on that first Easter morning is so much greater than any gift someone could give us or that we could give, and the fact that we have nothing material to look forward to makes it all the better. There is no gift greater, and it goes so far beyond our understanding, that if we are left with anything less than awe, love, and gratitude, we need to look again.



*Russell Peter reading a lesson at Convocation*

**T**he gifts we receive on Christmas are often underneath the tree. The gift we receive today is on it.

There is one tangible thing I can think of that I can’t wait to get back. It’s a single word we use several times a day, and there’s nothing stopping me from using it but rubrics; but I think I’ll let that be its own Easter gift. Alleluia!

*Russell Peter Gallagher*



## SHEPHERDS, NOT SHEEP

As you probably know, today is “Good Shepherd Sunday.” All of the Sundays of Easter Season have traditional names: the Sunday after Easter is called “Low Sunday” — nowadays we say that “low” really refers to the number of people who come to church on that day following the packed pews of Easter. Easter III is known as “Thomas Sunday,” because the gospel is usually about Thomas doubting that Jesus was really risen from the dead. And today, Easter IV, is known as “Good Shepherd Sunday” because the gospel is always part of the Good Shepherd discourses found in the 10th chapter of John’s Gospel.

The Good Shepherd story is one of those spiritual “comfort foods” that everyone loves to indulge in. It’s a story about cozy relationship; you know, the idea of being a helpless, fluffy little lamb that Jesus lovingly holds on his lap and protects; or being a little lost sheep that Jesus would leave all his other sheep for, to find and rescue. We all tend to think about ourselves as the passive, protected, coddled sheep. Yet that could not be further from the point that John is trying to get across. You see, if it was up to me — which it never is; nobody ever comes to me and asks me what I think about these things — but if it *were* up to me, I would rename this Sunday “Good Shepherds” Sunday, because this is more about *us becoming* capable shepherds, than it is about us being helpless sheep.

We all start as sheep; we have to; we need to be tended to and protected as we learn our faith. But growing in Christ means that, at some point, we realize Jesus needs shepherds: good shepherds, because there are plenty of sheep, and sheep have a tendency to stray; they make poor choices; they’re laid back and docile. Jesus wants us to be leaders, strong men and women, mature in our faith, who can care for the weaker members. The truth is that we are all called to become shepherds: shepherds who not only hear and recognize the voice of Jesus, but who can bring others within hearing range of that voice and help them hear it as well. Spreading the “good news” is every Christian’s responsibility — and therein lies today’s challenge.

**G**rowing in Christ means  
that we realize Jesus needs  
shepherds: good shepherds,  
because there are plenty of sheep...

There was once a man who suspected that his wife was losing her hearing, so he called to make an appointment for her to have a hearing exam. The doctor said he couldn’t see her for two weeks, but asked the man to do an informal test in the meanwhile, to give the doctor some idea of the severity of the problem. “Here’s

what you do,” he said. “Stand about forty feet away from your wife, speak in a normal conversational tone, and see if she hears you. If not, go to thirty feet, then twenty feet, and so on until you get a response.” So that evening, while the man was in the living room and his wife was in the kitchen about forty feet away, he asked, “Honey, what’s for dinner?” No response. He moved to the other end of the room, about thirty feet away. “Honey, what’s for dinner?” No response. So he moved into the dining room, about twenty feet away. Again, he asked, “Honey, what’s for dinner?” No response. On to the kitchen, only about ten feet away...”Honey, what’s for dinner?” No response. He finally walked right up behind her and said “Honey, what’s for dinner?” And she turned around and said, “For the fifth time: *chicken!*”

You see, sometimes it’s *us* who don’t hear the Shepherd’s voice. Or sometimes we hear it, but we don’t recognize whose voice it is. I can’t tell you how often I hear people say, “I’ve prayed and asked Jesus for such and such, and he just doesn’t seem to hear me.” Here’s something everyone should take home with them today: Jesus’ hearing is just fine. So let’s take a look at the story and see what it is that John wants *us* to hear today.

The story takes place on the Feast of the Dedication; that would be modern day Hanukkah. It’s a minor feast from after the time of the giving of Torah, and it recalls the re-dedication of the second temple after the Maccabees revolted 165 years before Christ’s birth. It was a revolt that left the Jewish people anticipating a Messiah who would overthrow foreign rule and re-establish Israel as an independent kingdom. John is painting a picture here that contrasts the political overtones of the feast with Jesus’ non-political agenda. That’s typical of John: he often uses feasts and festivals in his stories to create a background for what is to follow, but it’s also his way of emphasizing that Jesus is the fulfillment of the particular feast; as in this case, where Jesus eventually fulfills the *temple rationale and ritual*.

The people are beginning to get impatient with Jesus. They want to know who he is; they’re tired of all the mystery and the back and forth, so they press him: “Don’t keep us in suspense! If you’re the Messiah, just tell us.” Jesus responds, “I did tell you, but you didn’t believe me.” In other words, he is saying that while they heard his words and saw his actions, they didn’t recognize any of them. And the reason they didn’t recognize them is because they are not his sheep. “My sheep”, Jesus says, “recognize my voice. When they hear it, they follow me. I know exactly who my sheep *are*, and they know who I am, and when they hear my voice, they follow me.”

That’s the most important part of today’s gospel. Jesus knows who his sheep are, and when they hear his voice, they recognize it and they stop whatever they’re doing and they follow him. Those are the relationship parameters that are laid out for us today. Jesus very clearly tells us what being his follower entails. He doesn’t say, “I’ll find you and carry you around for the rest of your life.” No. This is a story about *mutual* relationship, where Jesus does his part and we are expected to do our part. He already knows who his sheep are; our job is to respond

and eagerly and energetically and joyfully walk *with* Jesus, following him by *imitating* him, and gathering others to walk with us on the same path. I think you'll agree that's very different than being carried around like a helpless creature! It takes action and resolve and energy, and maybe that's why so many of us tend to prefer the more passive choice.

**T**here are clues all around us  
that tell us what God is like.

So, what exactly does it take to hear his voice? It's simple: if we know Jesus, if we're in tune with who Jesus is and what Jesus expects, then we recognize and hear his voice. I don't know what this will mean to the younger folks here, but for those of us who remember transistor radios, it's sort of like having the dial tuned in to the exact station. If you're a number off either way the reception is distorted and sometimes you can't make out what's being said or who's saying it. But if you're tuned in just right, the signal comes through clearly and you hear and understand everything. If we're tuned in to Jesus, then his voice is easily recognized and his message comes through to us clearly.

Now sometimes, we do need to be carried a little, and that's O.K. Sometimes we need to allow others to help us recognize Christ's voice. That's why we come together as a community; that's why the *church* is organized the way it is; that's why a bishop carries a shepherd's staff, and bishops and priests are called "pastors." These are all resources for the sheep to come to for direction, comfort, feeding, and empowerment. Unfortunately, there are false prophets in the mix, some *not-so-good* shepherds, who would like us to believe that Jesus would condone things like war, racism, contempt for life, immorality. Jesus calls them "wolves in sheep's clothing" and part of being in tune with Jesus is knowing the difference between his voice and their's, and avoiding being misled by them.

Brothers and sisters, today's gospel invites us to learn about God through the things he created in our world. There are clues all around us that tell us what God is like. Today, we are also invited to learn about Jesus, to hear the voice of love and to fall *in love* for the first time or all over again: to follow him, and to live with him forever.

So, listen! Whose voice do you hear? And more importantly, whose voice do you follow?

*Richard John Lorino*