

## 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter – A

The story is told of an American seminarian in Rome who went shopping for a sweater, in Italian *maglia*, asked the store clerk for a *moglie*, a woman. Anyone who has tried to learn a new language and get some confidence knows you've got to get out onto the streets and practice it. But eventually, with persistence, practice and time the new language is learned. Cardinal Newman compared preparation for eternal life with God to learning a new language, the language of heaven. If we arrive in heaven without knowing the language of heaven we would always be ill at ease and always out of step. It would, in his words, be hell for us.

The gospel invites us to attune our ears to the voice of Christ in a world of almost infinite sounds, drowned out by the languages and messages of other shepherds. There are voices of thieves and bandits shouting at us today. Not only are they the voices of drug dealers who are stealing from so many people, or the economic rationalists who are enticing us into a selfish materialism and consumerism. Some of the harshest voices are those of the ultraconservative critics in the sheepfold robbing the flock of our Vatican II inheritance and doing subtle violence to anyone who differs from their self righteous positions. And there is a new group of critics condemning Pope Francis because he is not out there constantly condemning others for one thing or another, not saying what they think his should be saying. There is even a priest in Ireland who has labeled Pope Francis as the anti-Christ.

Jesus calls himself the "door." If you visit any of the ancient cathedrals in Europe look over the entrance to the church. Those portals are usually very, very ornate. You see no mere door but a work of art, centered amid sculptures of saints and angels, or an image of Mary under the title of "Gate of Heaven," or a sculpture of Christ swinging wide open the door to the wedding feast of heaven with the five foolish virgins on one side falling asleep and the five wise virgins on the other side standing wide awake to enter the wedding feast of heaven. Those sculptures are trying to tell

people that the church is the gateway that can convey us into a more profound experience of life and reality that we might not otherwise realize. And once we have passed through the gate of Christ we find that we ourselves also become gates for others where they may go in and out to find pasture. And as we become gates for others to God, we also become gates for God to come near to others. The gate swings both ways.