

Trusting God is the hardest thing. Today's gospel is extremely short, but extremely dense. Each phrase is an invitation to deep prayer.

The crowd had just asked Jesus if he is the messiah. Jesus does not directly answer this question, instead, he teaches something essential to the soul.

One of the fundamental spiritual challenges is learning to trust and follow God's guidance. We can easily fall into the trap of following our own guidance, our own voice, or the voice of someone who is less than God.

When we follow our own voice or some other person's voice in life, it never works out as planned. Our own voice is the voice of our ego, and when we follow our ego it always leads us into evil. When we follow someone else's voice, the same problem always emerges and when evil is consented to, it cannot be controlled. We see plenty of this every day in the world.

So then whose voice do we follow? Our soul can listen to the guidance of God, the voice of Jesus. This takes some practice. We have to learn to listen deeply, listening beyond what I want, or even what I think is best. We have to listen beyond our "I" for the voice of Jesus in our soul. This is the easy part, the hard part comes next: trusting and following the lead of Jesus.

Jesus tells us: I know you, that is not you in general. Jesus knows us individually. Jesus does not lead us in general. He leads us individually. He is willing to lead us to eternal life if we are willing to follow.

At each stage of our lives, following Jesus addresses a different set of questions and problems. Children face very difficult situations, just figuring out how to get along with brothers and sisters can take years. How to deal with difficult people, and difficult situations can seem insurmountable. Some children make the mistake of just shutting down their feelings, and this blocks them from the voice of the shepherd.

When we teach children to pray, we are teaching them to listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd in their souls. There is no more important life lesson.

As youth, it does not get any easier. Who am I? What is true? What gives meaning to life? College, Marriage, Single Life, Priesthood, Religious life? What is it all about?

My experience is that my plans never work out, only by listening to the voice of Christ in the soul can we effectively find our way in the world. Does it get easier for adults? No!

All through life God continues to stretch us, putting us into situations that are intended to form us into beings capable of receiving eternal life.

The hardest of all is old age. All our illusions of control are shattered, and like Peter in last week's gospel, someone else fastens the belt around our waist. Giving love and receiving love. This is the type of person we become when we follow Jesus.

Learning to listen to the voice of Christ in our souls, and then, with the help of grace, learning to trust and follow Christ's lead. Trusting God is the hardest thing.