

The Gospel passage from John focuses on the unique and personal bond that shepherds have with their sheep.

“Whoever enters the gate is the shepherd of the sheep...The sheep hear his voice as the shepherd calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has driven out all his own, he walks ahead of them, and the sheep follow him, because they recognize his voice.”

This recognition doesn't happen quickly. It is something that develops over time. The shepherd has to build a connection with his flock. When he calls them, he leads them to green pastures to eat their fill or to streams where they can drink.

This voice comforts them in times of injury or fear and guides them back when they have wandered away. All of these experiences help build a bond of trust that is crucial for survival.

The dilemma we as followers can have with this image of the shepherd and the sheep is the fact that it is not a part of our everyday experience. There must be a more relevant image for us to relate to: what about a pet and the relationship they have with their owner?"

A pet/ owner relationship may be a relevant image when it comes to talking about our relationship with our God. Dogs are a common sight in Milton and Edgerton. I see people walking their dogs around my neighborhood every day and I also, as most of you know, have a dog, a golden retriever named Lily. Lily has been my companion for 6 years and in that time, like the shepherd and the sheep, she has come to know my voice.

Over time Lily has learned who feeds her, walks her, has treats for her, comforts her during thunderstorms and is there for her. She knows that when my voice is

higher in pitch I am praising her and when my voice is lower and slower I am scolding her. Our relationship is built on experience.

That is the point of our gospel today. If we want a relationship with God that is relevant and meaningful then we have to work at it. God is talking to us all the time in a multitude of experiences and people. It is our responsibility to listen in those experiences and to those people. It means that at times we will need to be quiet and attentive and other times we will need to pray with all our heart and mind and soul. God's voice comes to us through our life experiences: In the happy times, the sad times, the frustrating times, the angry times, and the fearful times. His voice beckons, directs, guides, and corrects us. It is a voice we can trust and follow in a world of many voices all

competing for our attention.

Be encouraged today and know that hearing the voice of God and following it is not an easy task. It takes discipline to learn the voice of God that comes to us every day. We may not always understand the message and there may be times when we simply ignore God's voice because we are attracted to another voice that distracts us. What we must learn in our experiences with God, what we must understand is that the voice of God is always there. Our shepherd knows our names and with a voice of love, reassurance and tenacity he calls us to follow Him.