

#### **4<sup>th</sup> Sunday Easter, John 10:27-30**

My mom trained us to hear her voice...all away across the neighborhood. She would yell, "*Michael Francis, you better come home now.*" When she added my middle name, I knew I was in trouble! The fear of God took hold of me. The embarrassing thing was that now half the city also knew my middle name and would tease me, "Michael Francis." This was in the days when they had good PA systems. My mom's voice beat them all.

On the other hand, my mom would read to us in the evening before bedtime, usually from our *Bible Stories* book. They had great pictures, some of which were quite frightening, like the *Mother and her Seven Sons* from the book of Maccabees. My mom had seven sons, and I guess that is why she like to read that story, a lot. I know we all enjoyed sitting around her listening to her voice. I think that was the best part, since she was a great reader

In today's gospel Jesus mentioned ***five key things*** in this very short passage: *My sheep hear my voice, Jesus knows his sheep, The sheep know Jesus, he will give them Eternal Life, and no one can take them out of his hand.*

***The sheep hear Jesus' voice***, is the most important. Each Sunday with the Liturgy of the Word we get to know the voice of God and his son, Jesus. It may not be with real sound-waves like my mother's voice, but we do get to know the mind of Jesus, what he thinks, says, and does each Sunday.

***Listening to the Word of God*** is not something the Church started new out of nowhere but has existed in a more formal way since the time of Moses, with his speeches and exhortations to the People of Israel. With the invention of the written word, the ancient oral traditions of the Chosen People were eventually written down. These sacred writings of the Hebrew Testament allow the Voice of God to speak to us throughout the centuries through the writings of the prophets and through the evangelists.

That is why we need to read and meditate on the Word of God in order to know his voice better and to know the mind of God. Just listening to his word one day a week is not enough. Reading and reflecting on the Word of God can be enhanced in a ***faith community***, especially where each member shares on how the Word of God has touched them.

***My sheep hear my voice and Jesus knows his sheep.*** The question is, do we really know Jesus? The apostles thought they did until he started

washing their feet. The real test came in the Garden of Gethsemane. But the Son of God, **who promises us Eternal Life**, not only waits for our response, but he will also come after us. If one believes the religious poem, *The Hound of Heaven*, God doesn't give up. Sadly, many wait until we are near death till we get to really know him and love him. Fortunately, **Jesus promises that no one can snatch us out of his hands**, but that doesn't prevent us from drifting away from him due to our own lack of interest, distraction, or being possessed by something or someone else.

Today's reading of the Good Shepherd, is also about the SHEEP. Jesus' whole life was committed to his sheep, not just a particular ewe, or ram, or even the lambs, but the whole flock. Jesus was concerned to keep all one hundred sheep safe and even going after the **one who was lost**. Jesus said, "I know THEM...THEY know me...I will give THEM eternal life...no one can take THEM out of my hand."

The flock of each parish is unique because of the individual members coming together under one shepherd. Yes, even though the shepherd really represents Christ, they can and will be replaced. But again, if the sheep know the voice of Christ, they should still be able to hear his voice no matter the stand-in. The reason I am mentioning this is that many times with the change of the shepherd, the flock sometimes disperses. Yet, Jesus mentions something important at the end of this very short gospel, and the evangelist just leaves it at that, "The Father and I are one." That only says one thing, that if we want to be like Jesus and the Father, we have to always strive to be one, one flock united in Christ. And that is not easy!

Just a reminder to the pastors, last Sunday's gospel addressed to us pastors, if we love Jesus, then feed his sheep. Don't let them starve!

I asked my mother one time while she was quietly praying, "Do you love God?" "Yes, Michael, I love God with all my heart," she answered. Then out of nowhere I asked her again. "Do you love God more than me?" My mother paused, knowing the importance of her answer, and she answered, "Yes, I love God more than you!" I sat with that answer all these years.

Do you love God more than your mother, spouse, children, whoever? Because if you don't, then you might find it difficult to feed others in the Lord's flock, let alone yourself.