

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

Sr. Colleen Gibson writes in *Catholic Women Preach*, "As the psalmist sings, 'We are God's people, the sheep of his flock.' God knows us and loves us, even when we don't hear so well. At a moment in our church and (in) our world when people have stopped listening to one another or are selectively listening to the voices they agree with, we must remember, no one is greater than the others, ***we are all sheep***. Created in the ***image and likeness of the Lamb***, we are called to follow him wherever he leads. To do this, we must remain faithful to the grace of God, acting as instruments of salvation, striving for justice, and allowing joy and the Holy Spirit to be pervasively present in all we do." End quote.

Sr. Coleen points out an important point, "People have stopped listening to one another or are selectively listening to the voices that agree with them." That is the stumbling block in today's electronic age, where one can now ***select out*** anyone who we may disagree with them using the filters on our cell phones, even though that may mean we might even select out the gospel message. We can choose all those who are like us to the extent that those who might challenge us for our own good can be ***selected out***.

In the first reading from Acts of the Apostles, that is exactly what happened to Paul and Barnabas, when those who objected to their manner and message. But Paul then boldly declares that they will speak to those who will hear them, who have ***NOT selected them out***. This, of course, delights the Gentiles to no end, who are eager to hear and take up the gospel message.

Unfortunately, the youth of the present generation are not only *tuned out* via their cell phones, and laptops, they are not even interested. Christian Smith in his book, *Why Religion Went Obsolete*, mentions that the digital media created alternative and flexible ways to find ***community*** that required fewer commitments, instantly connecting ***without*** someone having to physically move. And now any generation can even ***pick and choose*** who they want to hang out with. Someday it may be an AI person, ***a fake person***. As the oldest generation, we have a special access to the youngest generation via our ***grandparent-hood*** where we can still influence them.

The most important message in today's gospel is, "My sheep hear my voice," We need to reach out before we lose a generation at their youngest and formative age, while they are still listening and we are not yet filtered out.

"Some shepherds," writes Peter Kreeft, "(are) like sheep dogs, (and) move their sheep by fear. They walk behind them and chase them in the direction they want them to go. Other shepherds move their sheep by love. They walk ahead of the sheep and the sheep follow the shepherd because they know his voice and trust him. Jesus is the second kind of shepherd, the good shepherd. The force by which he moves us is love."

"(Yet) love is **not** essentially a feeling but a **knowing**; in fact, the deepest kind of knowing...The opposite of love is not hatred but **indifference**, because you can both love and hate the same person at the same time—in fact it's probably someone in your family. But you can't love and be indifferent to the same person at the same time."

The short gospel passage today has some very powerful statements by Jesus, as mentioned above. **"My sheep hear my voice."** Another powerful statement Jesus makes is, **"I know them."** But what does it mean to "know" Christ? It means to love him and to trust him. Love and trust always go together. If you don't love somebody, you can't trust them, and if you can't trust them, you don't love them."

The prophetic book of Hosea address this very subject of God's love for his people. Hosea's relationship with Gomer is a prophetic symbol of the problem of Israel's relationship with God. His wife Gomer was formerly a Temple Prostitute. At one point Gomer runs away because she misses her former life, but Hosea finds her and brings her back and tries again, which is again symbolic of what God does with our own unfaithfulness.

God forgives us because of his great love for us, a love that is NOT a feeling, but a knowing, hoping that we will love and know God in return. AS a church, we are the bride of Christ, a special relationship that goes beyond just Jesus Christ as our God but also as our spouse as a people of God, the Body of Christ. Through the Sacraments, Jesus keeps calling us back to faithfulness.

Here is God's future promise to Israel as recorded in the Book of Hosea:

"I will espouse you to me forever: I will espouse you in righteousness and in justice, in love and in mercy. I will espouse you in fidelity, and **you shall know the Lord.**" The Hebrew language didn't have the word for sex; they used the phrase **"to know"** instead. **"You shall know the Lord,"** means you shall love the Lord with an intimate knowing, not just agape, or Phila, but the intimacy that comes close to the Greek word, **"erose."**