

GOSPEL

JOHN 10:27-30

Jesus said:

'The sheep that belong to me listen to my voice; I know them and they follow me.

I give them eternal life; they will never be lost and no one will ever steal them from me.

The Father who gave them to me is greater than anyone, and no one can steal from the Father. The Father and I are one.'

The Gospel of the Lord.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How do you listen for Jesus' voice in your life?
2. What helps you identify Jesus' voice out of the many voices?
3. What does the phrase, "They will never be lost" mean to you?

A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

Today's Gospel offers us some of Jesus' expressions during the feast of the dedication of the Temple of Jerusalem, which is celebrated at the end of December. He is found on the Temple grounds, and perhaps that enclosed sacred space suggested to Him the image of the sheepfold and the shepherd. Jesus is presented as "the Good Shepherd", and says, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand". These words help us to understand that no one can call himself a follower of Jesus, if he does not listen to His voice. And this "listening" should not be understood in a superficial way, but in an engaging way, to the point of making possible a true mutual understanding, from which one can come to a generous following, expressed in the words, 'and they follow me'. It is a matter of listening not only with ears, but listening with the heart!

And so, the image of the shepherd and the sheep indicates the close relationship that Jesus wants to establish with each one of us. He is our guide, our teacher, our friend, our model, but above all he is our Saviour. In fact, the following expressions from the Gospel passage affirm, "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand". Who can say that? Only Jesus, because the "hand" of Jesus is one thing with the "hand" of the Father, and the Father is "greater than all".

These words communicate to us a sense of absolute security and immense tenderness. Our life is fully secure in the hands of Jesus and the Father, which are a single thing: a unique love, a unique mercy, revealed once and for all in the sacrifice of the Cross. To save the lost sheep which we all are, the Shepherd became lamb, and let himself be immolated so as to take upon himself and to take away the sin of the world. In this way he has given us life, life in abundance!

This mystery is renewed, in an always surprising humility, on the Eucharistic table. It is there that the sheep gather to nourish themselves; it is there that they become one, among themselves and with the Good Shepherd.

Because of this we are no longer afraid: our life is now saved from perdition. Nothing and no one can take us from the hands of Jesus, because nothing and no one can overcome his love. Jesus' love is invincible. The evil one, the great enemy of God and of his creatures, attempts in many ways to take eternal life from us. But the evil one can do nothing if we ourselves do not open the doors of our hearts to him, by following his deceitful enticements.

The Virgin Mary heard and obediently followed the voice of the Good Shepherd. May she help us to welcome with joy Jesus' invitation to become his disciples, and to always live in the certainty of being in the paternal hands of the Father.

REFLECTION QUESTION

- What has struck you from this reflection by the Holy Father?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the 'Glory Be' or similar prayer.