



## ***LISTEN AND LEARN!!***

In a recent study in England cited in a scientific journal, tape recordings were made of thirty-one newborn infants and played for their mothers in a series, so that each time the mothers of the newborns heard five different babies cry in a row. In the first two days after her baby was born, twelve of the twenty-three mothers in the sample recognized their own baby's cry. After two days, all of the mothers tested recognized their own child's cry. In another part of the experiment, mothers in a hospital ward with lots of mothers and lots of children were found to wake up when their own baby cried, but were able to sleep through the cries of other children. As human beings, we can be remarkably adept at listening when we know something is truly important to us.

Jesus said in today's Gospel that his sheep hear his voice and follow him. But even more sensitively than a mother hearing the cries of her child, Jesus has heard the voices of those who cry out to him. He pointed to the need for faith and mutuality in today's Gospel. Jesus and God the Father are one, with an unbreakable unity, and that is the sort of unity Jesus wants for his followers.

**In the first reading, Paul and Barnabas proclaim the Good News of Jesus to both Jews and gentiles.** The apostles wanted to establish a new unity in Christ between Jews and Gentiles. Large, excited crowds came to hear the message that God's favor could be shared with everyone. It was a message that promised comfort to the outcast and downtrodden. But large crowds brought jealousy and concern to those comfortable with things the way they were. We know in our own time that some people worry more about what will happen to them if things change regarding the distribution of health care or if measures are taken to control climate change than they worry about what will happen if things go on in the troublesome way in which they seem to be headed. Behind the scenes, in an effort to maintain the status quo, people fearful of losing their "special place" in the scheme of things stirred up others to do their dirty work against Paul and Barnabas.

**But Jesus wanted things to change. Jesus was ready to give eternal life.** The Good News that Paul and Barnabas had to share had come from Jesus himself. Jesus promised that those who heard his voice and followed him would never perish. Life was and is the gift of Jesus to those who listen to him, whom he recognized as following him. Jesus redefined community for his followers as the result of discipleship, not as an accident of birth. Jesus could make such a promise because of his intimate relationship with God the Father.

**Jesus called God the Father "Abba," a word denoting incredible intimacy.** Abba is translated "Father" in the Gospel, but it bespeaks a special intimacy. Abba is not so much a word about male or female, power or position, or any of the things by which we so often judge one another's place in society; it is a word about closeness and trust.

**John's vision in Revelation reinforces the diversity to be found among the followers of Jesus.** First of all, the followers of Jesus were to be a great multitude, beyond the ability of anyone to count. The followers of Jesus came "from every nation, race, people and tongue." Our concerns about skin colors and accents and documentation of immigrants may not be as important as we thought. The followers of Jesus have been brought together by their discipleship, by following Jesus who is their shepherd. Jesus leads his followers to springs of life-giving water in the desert.

Those who believe in Jesus, those who seek to hear and heed his voice as best they can, will arrive at a whole new reality. We know that we are not perfect and that we cannot live without recognizing our brokenness and need for others. We are not complete by ourselves, but we are part of the flock which Jesus tends. Community grows out of our commitment to caring for each other. As Jesus and the Father are One, their relationship grows from mutual love, and our relationships will grow from mutual love, too.