

Fourth Sunday of Easter

Year C

Acts 13:14, 43-52
Ps 100:1-2, 3, 5
Rev 7:9, 14b-17
Jn 10:27-30

Mark A. Garrett, O.S.A.

“They hear my voice,” he said. He was talking about us.

Really? Do we?

Do you hear voices?

Yes, I would say you do. I sure do!

Do we listen? Can we really hear?

Frank – the little story goes – was worried that the lady he married forty years ago was growing deaf. So one day when she was working in the garden, he went out, stood on the other side of the yard, about thirty feet behind her, and called out, “Mary!”

No answer.

Frank came fifteen feet closer. “Mary!”

Still no answer. Frank was getting worried. Worse than I expected, he thought.

He went up right behind her, almost touching, as she knelt over her planting. “Mary!”

This time a response: “For the third time, Frank, what is it??”

We can hardly blame Frank for having trouble hearing – could hardly blame Mary, if it were her problem.

Their world – our world – has gotten louder. We hear thousand of voices – all the time. Our ears get assaulted so much, that it’s a wonder we can hear the quiet, intimate, gentle voices at all. We hear so much that’s just noise.

We hear lots of talk, lots of yelling, lots of loud, loud music. Ads play on TV several decibels louder than the programs they interrupt. People who can’t really sing shout their way into short-lived fame – “idols,” rap stars, even quasi-famous people tossing in-your-face provocations and insults in the name of art or “free-speech.”

We hear plenty of voices. Are they the ones we most want to hear? – most need to hear?

Just lately we’ve been made privy to people ranting at their daughter on voice mail. Did we want to hear that? I feel like I’ve accidentally overheard a horrible family quarrel; it makes me uncomfortable. More important question: what does it make the poor daughter feel like,

having the whole country – maybe most of the world – hear her father saying those things about her?

Is that fair? Don't kids have it hard enough just dealing with the nasty things they sometimes have to put up with from their classmates? – or the offensive things schoolmates might put on the Internet about them? And now... why does one pre-teen girl have to deal with even more junk people can throw up to her? Do we care what troubles our children have to deal with?

We've heard another voice lately, too. A college student flipped out one day recently down in Virginia after years of not being able to deal with what the world threw at him. We've seen and heard his rants and his anger in just about every form of media there is. (Not in movies yet, but wait a few months.)

One of the things heaped on him in his young life was the taunting he received during his school years from kids who were... – well, honestly – maybe just afraid of his demeanor and his shyness and his not-quite-“American” speech patterns. I wonder if maybe he heard too many abusive voices.

Maybe his elementary or high school classmates also had heard their own wrong set of voices. Could that be what made them afraid of someone different, someone not “like them”?

There are now many of us who can't think of all that without tears. There are many now who wish we – or someone – could have added in all those young lives some kind words of encouragement, of empathy, of understanding.

See, there's that about us: we've heard some other voices – you and I have. We know of Someone who was taunted and maybe we've wept or felt sorry for Him. We've heard Him say we should not return insult, even for insults hurled at us. We've heard Him say some challenging things about “turning the other cheek.”

Not only that – we've seen Him do what he talked about. A month ago we all gathered here in church and we heard and read about how crowds went so quickly from “Hosanna” to “Crucify Him!” Likely, we heard our own voices – our own voices! – say, “Crucify Him,” for that's how we almost always proclaim the Passion of Jesus to one another on Palm Sunday and Good Friday.

On those days, too, we experienced Saint Peter's denial: “I do not know the man!” Maybe we were among those who said it – maybe not in the reading of the Passion – maybe sometimes we've said it with our daily lives “outside church.”

What was Jesus' response to all that? We heard that just last Sunday: “Simon Peter, do you love me?” Again the words of Jesus – this time reaching out with healing for a man who was afraid and said things he regrets.

What about us? Did we hear Jesus' words – I mean, really hear them? Can we answer the way Peter did?

Of course, we can't do that unless we really do hear Jesus' voice. Unless we're open to hearing Him still – coming along with us in our lives, and, as Paul and Barnabas did in Antioch, giving us encouragement and challenging us with His word. Maybe we should say, challenging us with the Word that he is!

Jesus has indeed spoken to our hearts and has given us his word. As he did to Simon Peter, he asks for our love. Can we hear him? We're not deaf, are we? Deaf like Frank in my little story back there – not knowing we're deaf – thinking it's all someone else's problem.

And then this –

Christ's sheep – even (or especially!) the young lambs – need to hear encouragement from us. Not more ranting and berating. Not insults and stupidities about how different some people look or how differently they talk, or where they come from. Not put-downs and clichés in the face of difference and newness. Nor attempts at limiting God's care and mercy and love just to people who are "like us."

"Do you love me?" he said.

Do we? Can we love others in his name – "people of every tribe and nation and tongue"?

Against all the background of so much noise and so many values far, far from what we know to be Jesus' message – in the midst of all that, do we really hear the voice of Jesus and is he the one we follow?

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He is the One we follow, isn't He? He is the One in whom we place our faith....

We believe in one God....