

Ordinary Time 16B 2015

Who Do You Follow?

Tell me who your heroes are, and you will tell me something about yourself. Tell me who you admire and imitate, and you will tell me who you are. You see, whether we realize it or not, whether we acknowledge it or not, all of us imitate and learn from other people. If we imitate good people, we become like them, and learn to live better. But when we imitate the wrong people, we become like them: we become filled with their fears and prejudices. And filled with their fears and prejudices, we fall into factions that divide us.

One of the reasons our society is so polarized today is there are so many conflicting voices competing for our attention. Many of these voices appeal to our fears, especially our fear of people who are different from us. Other voices pander to our selfish desires, telling us only those things we want to hear. Still others pit us against each other and make us rivals rather than companions on the journey of life.

But today's liturgy presents us with another voice, a voice that calls us to unity and peace, a voice that teaches us what God wants us to be in Christ. We hear this voice in today's second reading in which St. Paul tells us that Jesus Christ broke down "the dividing wall of enmity." When St. Paul wrote these words, he was describing how Jesus Christ broke destroyed barriers that divided the Jewish

and Gentile people of his day. He was reminding them how Christ had united them in a new humanity through his death on the cross. Today these words remind us that Christ came to break down every barrier that would divide and separate us from each other.

But if you listen to the voices that shout at us every day, you will hear voices that want to separate and divide us. You can even hear these voices in the most sacred of places, in places that should unite rather than divide us. But today's liturgy reminds there is only one voice that can unite us, *the voice* of the good shepherd of whom Jeremiah speaks in today's first reading, *the voice* of the good shepherd whose heart was moved to pity when he saw the vast crowds like sheep without a shepherd, *the voice* of the one who breaks down the barriers that separate us by giving his own life for our sake.

Who we listen to and imitate makes all of difference. If we listen to the voices of fear and division, we will be divided and filled with their fear. But if we listen to the voice of the good shepherd, if we listen to the living voice of Christ that we hear in the gospel, we will live in peace and unity with each other. If we listen to this voice and imitate the good shepherd, we will live in, with, and for Christ.

What voice do you listen to? Who are the people you model your life after? Whom do you imitate?