

SCREEN: Happy Mother's Day!

I'd like to begin by again, wishing all mom's a Happy Mothers Day!

And mom, if you or your family are visitors, a special welcome.

We're so glad you're spending part of this weekend with us.

So I'll be with my mom to celebrate.

Even though we see each other every week for dinner,

and we talk on the phone a few times each week.

I'm 60 years old and so blessed to have my mom in my life.

I have one brother and four sisters, but I'll let you in on a secret, I'm my mom's favorite.

Don't laugh, it's true.

I think it's because my mom and I have a deep spiritual bond.

I credit my vocation as a priest to my mom.

I am convinced that her prayers for me through 8 years of seminary got me ordained.

And now she prays for me everyday.

Every conversation with my mom ends with her telling me

she loves me and is so proud of me.

Any time I'm struggling, or discouraged or feel overwhelmed,

I can call my mom knowing her voice has the power to lift me up.

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Do you have someone in your life like that?

Someone who fills you with hope and lifts you up?

A parent or sibling or friend who's voice gets you through dark or difficult times?

I hope you do because for a healthy and happy life,

everybody needs at least one voice like that.

And the reason we need it is because of all the other voices

we hear on a daily basis.

Voices that are not always good and affirming.

Voices with the power to discourage, distract and disturb.

On any given week hundreds of voices are vying for our attention.

Hundreds; between family, friends, coworkers and classmates, not to mention TV, radio, the internet and social media.

One of the greatest challenges we face is figuring out which voices to listen to and which to ignore, and how to filter out the harmful ones.

SCREEN: Faith 101 main screen

Today we're continuing our Easter message series titled, Faith 101.

In this four week series Jesus gives us some basic lessons on how to follow him.

Today's lesson is that we must hear his voice first.

The Gospel reading today described our relationship with Jesus.

He said it's like the one between the sheep and the shepherd.

So let's break this analogy down to figure out what Jesus is saying.

Shepherding in Israel hasn't changed much in 2000 years.

The job of every shepherd is to care for the flock by feeding and guarding them.

He protects them from the elements, from wild animals and from robbers.

The reason sheep need a shepherd is that they are gentle creatures; they're vulnerable.

Sheep can easily get lost and go astray.

So long as the shepherd is there and so long as the sheep listen to his voice, they remain healthy and safe.

Sheep can recognize the voice of their shepherd from other voices.

So Jesus had all of this in mind when he said this to his followers:

SCREEN: My sheep hear my voice;

I know them, and they follow me.

I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish.

No one can take them out of my hand.

No one can take them out of my hand.

But he's letting us know that others will try.

Every disciple is vulnerable to the influence and power of other voices.

Every disciple, including me and you.

If you want to stay close to Christ,

you need to be sure you are hearing his voice first,

and louder and clearer than every other voice in your life.

Otherwise you could be led astray.

You don't need me to tell you we live in challenging times.

With the internet and social media,

a single negative or hurtful voice can rob your peace of mind,

or distract or hurt you deeply.

Jesus's own disciples faced this constantly.

They didn't have the technology we have but they had to contend

with harmful and hurtful voices every day.

And here's how they survived:

--they kept their eyes on Christ,

--they remembered his words, and

--they prayed for strength.

If they hadn't done these things they never would have made it,

and we wouldn't be here now.

SCREEN: blank red background

If you want to be strong, steadfast and focused like they were,

start by figuring out which voices in your life you need to amplify,

which ones you need to turn down,

and which you need to tune out completely.

If you're like most people, I'll bet there are a few people in your life

that always bring you down by their negativity, their gossip,

their constant complaining or judging.

Sadly, they may be family members, friends, co workers or parishioners.

With each person in your life, ask yourself,

*'does this voice, this person, uplift me, encourage me,
leave me feeling better about myself and my life, or not?*

Does this person help me grow closer to God or not?'

If not, turn them off, filter them out, avoid them, or shut them down.

It's tough if they are family or people you see regularly,
but do whatever you need to do to filter them out.

If you find that social media or other media
is a source of noise or hurt or distraction,
switch it off and disconnect.

Maybe there are certain voices you need to unfriend or unfollow.

As hard as it can be to do, it may be the only way for you
to hear God's voice above all others.

Remember that your first priority as a member of Christ's flock
is to follow him and stay close to him.

Any voice that leads you astray has to go.

Otherwise, you run the risk of being taken out of Jesus's hand.

Now there is a flip side of this which could be even more challenging
for some of you and it's this:

make sure you are not being a negative or harmful voice for others.

Don't contribute to the noise in some else's life.

Resist the urge to offer an opinion on everything others do or say.

Exercise some self restraint.

When it comes to social media, like Facebook,

don't endlessly post or comment or pass on things that are negative or divisive.

Otherwise you're contributing to the current climate of our culture.

You and I have a divine calling to lead others to Jesus.

You can be a good shepherd with your voice.

You have the power—the amazing power—to be a voice of good,

a voice of hope and joy for those who are hurting, seeking or lost.

Use the gift and power you've been given to help Christ's Kingdom grow.

I was so encouraged by the examples of Paul and Barnabas
in our second reading today.

When the town they were preaching in rejected and expelled them,
here's what we heard they did:

SCREEN: they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them,
and went to Iconium.

Notice what didn't they do:

they didn't hit back, didn't plot revenge, didn't erupt in anger.

They disconnected and distanced themselves from the haters.

They said, *"let's shake it off and move on."*

Sometimes the most powerful response is none at all.

I wish I could say I always do what Paul and Barnabas did.

When I get a negative communication, my first thought is,

'I've got to react right away. I've got to respond now!'

And it's always the wrong response. Always.

I let 24 hours go by.

I cool down, I pray, I consider what might be behind
the criticism or attack or comment.

Maybe you've heard this phrase:

don't let someone live rent free in your head.

It means don't let someone who is hurtful or harmful run your life,
disturb your peace and take you away from God.

Instead take the high road.

Be like Paul and Barnabas, shake it off.

Let it go, ignore it, just walk away.

This requires maturity, spiritual maturity.

It also requires prayer...prayer for yourself and for the other person.

SCREEN: Faith 101 main screen

Here's the takeaway for this message series (hold up)

Be sure to get one of these on your way out of church.

For each week of this series, there is a task for you.

Think of it as your Faith 101 homework assignment.

This week's task is to create more space in your life to hear God's voice.

So carve out some quiet time in your daily routine.

Don't turn on the TV first thing in the morning.

Decide you're not going to check your email as soon as you open your eyes.

Try some silence on your way to school or work or home.

How about turning off your TV, smartphone or other devices in the evening?

And also give others some quiet time by cutting back on the amount of time you spend on social media.

Try these things and I guarantee you'll hear God's voice more clearly.

Because you'll be creating a space which the Lord can fill with calm and peace.

I began talking about how my mom's voice helps me remain close to Christ.

As you and I are called to hear the voice of Jesus first, may we always use our voices to lead others to His Kingdom. Amen. +