

For Sunday, April 22, 2018

An Intimate Relationship with God

Fourth Sunday of Easter

<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/042218.cfm>

Acts 4:8-12

1 John 3:1-2

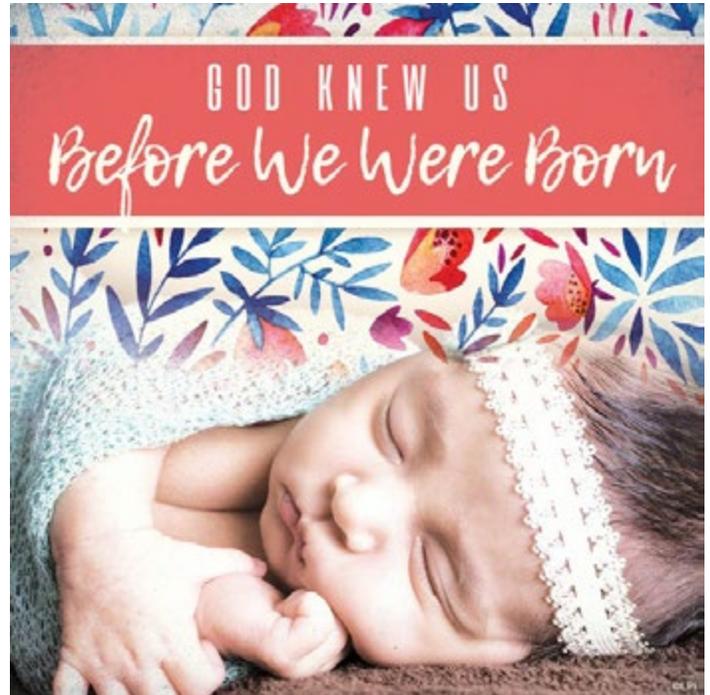
John 10:11-18

As a newly pregnant mother years ago, I remember hearing that newborns could distinguish their mothers from other women by scent, and mothers could smell random clothing and know exactly which ones belonged to their babies. I was so intrigued by this. I mean, I could recognize my husband's cologne or feel nostalgic at the scent of laundry detergent I remember my parents using. But to have the scent of one's personhood be the deciding factor of knowing was incredible to me. When my first child was born, it rocked my world, and I experienced firsthand that amazing chemical bond between mother and infant.

Knowing that comes from more than intellect and observation is something that forms who we are. When an infant knows his mother by scent, he knows more than just what his olfactory cells are telling him. The scent is just what sets her apart from those around him. But what it means is safety, warmth, nourishment, and wholeness. The mother's knowing goes far beyond being able to pick her baby out of a crowd. Her knowing engulfs a sense of urgency to protect the child and care for him and the feeling of utter incompleteness when she's away from the baby. Knowing by these standards is more about intimacy than knowledge. And it's the same kind of knowing we hear of in the readings this weekend in our relationship with God the Father.

In the first reading, St. Peter speaks of this knowing when he declares Christ as the cornerstone. *"He is the stone rejected by you, the builders."* This phrase indicates a lack of intimacy and knowledge of Christ. But it's not just the early Church that needed to hear this. We all need to hear this today. I often wonder how many times Christ is making himself known to me in the current events of the world today and my own life. I suspect I often reject him, pushing him aside in the name of distractibility on social media or a new exciting project I've undertaken. When I argue with friends about a certain article or news event, I'm showing my lack of intimacy with Christ, rather than reaching out to the poor or lonely right in front of me. If I really knew him as a helpless infant knows his mother, the rest would seem trivial. I would do all in my power to cleave to him and to follow wherever his scent leads me.

The second reading is a continuation of this call to intimacy with Christ as the foundation of our faith. Our identity comes as children of God. The very essence of who I am is found in who God is because I belong to Him. While this truth is comforting, the impact of it doesn't really take hold in me until I read the next few lines. *"The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him."* Our world continues to be a tumultuous place. Politics alone are enough to cause huge uproars in communities and families. Then we add in threats of wars and more, and it seems almost unbearable. It can feel hard to find our place as Christians in



a world like this. I sense the tension of the cross as we see the world around us to our right and left yet try to always look up to heaven. If we feel discomfort by the chaos around us, it's a reminder that we aren't made for this world.

Finally, we hear the words of Jesus in the Gospel confirming these truths in the Good Shepherd discourse. To be fruitful disciples, we must first allow ourselves to be shepherded. We must allow the wounded and lost parts of our own hearts to be found and healed by love himself.

This truth is radical and bold, especially in our country today. Instead of following the trends of self-dictated autonomy, we hear of a God who literally destroyed the power of death over us as a means to prove His love for us. His knowing of us is deeper and more intimate than any mother and infant bond. The love of Christ pours out with the power of a hundred Niagara Falls as He tells us that each one of us is loved, wanted, and sought after no matter how far we stray.

Now as a mother of four, I have tasted familial closeness and that desire to do anything for my children. Yet I am only getting a little tiny taste of the closeness that Christ is offering to me in the pages of Scriptures this weekend. During this Easter season, it's a great time to pray a little more and to start to respond to the call of the Good Shepherd. I know that with my children, deep knowing comes through time. The more years we spend together, the more deeply rooted we grow as a family and the more we truly know each other. This Easter, I want to be spending even more time allowing my heart to grow with Christ — to let him parent my heart as his child — and grow in intimacy with him.

“Let us then be convinced of this and it will be for us a source of immense strength: God may allow me to occasionally lack money, health, abilities and virtues, but He will never leave me in want of Himself.” (from “Searching for and Maintaining Peace: A Small Treatise on Peace of Heart” by Fr. Jacques Philippe)

Angie Windnagle

PRAYER

Lord, I am yours,
and I must belong to no one but you.
My soul is yours,
and must live only by you.
My will is yours,
and must love only for you.
I must love you as my first cause,
since I am from you.
I must love you as my end and rest,
since I am for you.
I must love you more than my own being,
since my being subsists by you.
I must love you more than myself,
since I am all yours and all in you.
Amen
— *Prayer of St. Francis de Sales*

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