

The important point that Jesus makes in today's Gospel is that being members of his flock, being gathered to him, depends far less on us than we think. He has told us many times,

No-one can come to me unless the Father draw him

and the sheep that belong to him are given to him by the Father; this possession is depicted as something unbreakable, because it is a divine gift. We can trace this theme through the whole Gospel: those who accept Jesus are enabled to become children of God, born not from human stock or human desire or human will, but of God himself. Jesus says:

*Everyone the Father gives to me will come to me;
and I will certainly never reject anyone who comes to me;
for I have come from heaven not to do my own will but the will of the one who sent me;
and his will is that I should lose nothing of all he has given to me,
and that I should raise it up on the last day.*

The ones who resist incorporation into the flock do so because they refuse to make Jesus' word their home. This is because they have not been generated from God, but have a different Father. In the bitterest dialogue between Jesus and his fellow-Jews he accuses them of not being Children of Abraham, the father of all who believe, because they do not believe in Jesus, who is the only Son of the Father. Rejecting the Son, they lose the Father also; they cannot be children of God without being brothers and sisters of Jesus. So he accuses them of living as children of the Father of Lies: the devil.

This explains why he rounds on the people in the Temple, and denounces them as unbelievers, as *no sheep of mine*. There is a mystery here. Jesus reminds us: *You did not choose me. I chose you*. In other place he says: *My choice has drawn you out of the world*; and this choosing is not an incidental thing that happens casually. It is one with the choice of the Father, which decreed our making in the first place; God does not have any further choice to make once he has created. He creates for eternity, and the will to save us is the consequence of the will that we should exist. God doesn't create some people in order to lose them. The existence of every one of us is destined to end in eternal life and joy. Only our refusal can bring upon us the dreadful verdict, *you are no sheep of mine*.

But we must never think of our lives as dependent on our knowledge or our wisdom or our talent for being religious. We depend for salvation on the choice of God; we depend on the same choice of God for life itself. To choose to be saved is simply to live in the truth, to live the real life that God holds out to us, with its eternal dimension. To reject the truth is to choose some lesser destiny, and that is death. Jesus says,

*I came that they might have life,
and live it to the full.*