

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

The fourth Sunday of Easter is traditionally called “**Good Shepherd Sunday**”. It is a day to pray for different types of vocations to serve God’s people.

The shepherd image runs through all through scripture from the first book to the last, from the Book of Genesis to the Book of Revelation.

It is used to express God’s unique relationship to his people. For example, in Genesis 48:15 as Jacob approaches death he speaks lovingly of God who has been his shepherd from his birth. In Revelation 7:17 John describes Jesus as the one who will shepherd the elect to “springs of life-giving water”.

Jesus, in today’s gospel reading, applies the shepherd image to himself. Jesus presents himself both as the shepherd and gate of the sheepfold.

Both images express the commitment of the shepherd to lay down his life for the sheep. He guards the sheep by day and at night he lays across the gate to the sheepfold to guard against intruders.

The point is the relationship between Jesus and his followers is like the relationship between a shepherd and his sheep.

Jesus, the shepherd exhibits self-sacrificing love and service and the followers, the sheep, in turn, must be faithful, trusting, docile and obedient.

Jesus our good shepherd, the gate of the sheepfold; the Church walks along the streets of our life and, in the midst of our everyday circumstances, speaks to us to live our life with him, for only he is capable of satisfying our thirst for hope. He has a name for each of us, he knows us. We, in turn, have to know him, know his voice and come to him in the Church. Let us give him pride of place in every area of our life.

In addition to the prayers we are to offer today for more vocations to priesthood and religious life, we are encouraged to help those whom Christ calls to have the habit of self-sacrificing love and service to God's people. We are to help them to go through the years of training to become good shepherds in the Church.

We are also called to help those who have already become shepherds, that is, our priests to continue to give themselves to the people of God in a service of love for the Gospel and the Church.

Apart from those who have embraced or will embrace the priestly and religious life, God calls every single one of you to work for the Gospel. God calls all of you to be good shepherds; to have self-sacrificing love and service to the people in your communities. God calls you to make your unique contributions; spiritual, financial, material for the growth of the Parish.

What I am saying is that no matter who you are and circumstances and the situations you may find yourselves in you need to have positive impact on the lives of the people you come into contact with. They could be your spouses, children, students, workers, parishioners, friends etc. You should let them know that a good shepherd is there to protect them.

It is my prayer that the parents, the family members, the parish and the larger community will continue to have positive impact on the lives of the children who receive the Sacrament of First Holy communion in the Parish this weekend so that they may continue to listen to the voice of the good shepherd and grow in his spirit and wisdom.