

## 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

Fourth Sunday of Easter has been designated as “**World Day of Prayer for Vocations**”. It is a day on which we pray for more vocations to priesthood and religious life. It is also called “**The Good Shepherd Sunday**”.

The shepherd image runs all through Scripture. The shepherd was often depicted as the self-sacrificing caretaker of sheep who was dedicated to their well-being, brought back the lost and kept them safe from the many dangers in the pasture.

Hence the shepherd image is used to express God’s unique care and relationship to his people. For example, in Psalms 77 and 78 God is seen as the one leading his people through the desert like a shepherd leading his flock.

The leaders and kings of Israel are also called shepherds.

Jesus identifies himself in today’s gospel reading as the good shepherd. He said “**I am the good shepherd.**”

“I am the good shepherd” is one of the seven “I am plus predicate” titles in John’s Gospel in which Jesus says “I am” and includes another term.

The other “I am plus predicate titles in John’s Gospel are “I am the bread of life”(6:35,51), “I am the light of the world”(8:12; 9:5), “I am the gate”(10:9), “I am the resurrection and the life”(11:25), “I am the way and the truth and the life”(14:6) and “I am the true vine”(15:1,5). (Cf. *The Gospel of John* by F. Martin & W.M Wright IV)

Through these seven titles, Jesus discloses different aspects of himself and his saving work.

As the good shepherd, Jesus describes, in today’s gospel reading, his selfless, self-sacrificing love and concern for all his sheep including those that do not belong to his sheepfold. Jesus freely lays down his life for his sheep in order for them to receive life in abundance; to draw them into communion with himself and with the Father.

The ministers of Christ are appointed to be shepherds. That is, it is the will of the good shepherd that some of his sheep become shepherds to look after his flock in his name.

It is Christ who calls someone to follow him. But it is the work of the Christian community to help and pray for those whom Christ calls to become the shepherds that he wants them to be. We must help them as they go through the years of training to have a heart of self-sacrificing love and service to God and humanity.

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

Let us pray that like Peter in the first reading our priests will not be afraid to do the work of God and proclaim the goodness of God's healing, restoration and eternal salvation to all regardless of the material benefits they will get.

I will say that it is good to be shepherds of Christ but we need your prayerful support as we seek to overcome the challenges we face in our ministry today.

Apart from those who have embraced 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. He calls all of you to make your unique contributions to the growth of the Church and the smooth running of the country.

So no matter who you are and what you do and no matter the circumstances or situations you may find yourselves in you could have a positive impact on the lives of the people you come into contact with; the people entrusted to our care. They could be our children, students, workers etc. You should let them feel that a good shepherd is there for their well-being. You should let them see God's love.

Let us always remember that self-sacrificing love is the defining standard for all shepherds; priests, leaders, teachers, parents, etc. So let us always pray for this gift so that we may be faithful to our shepherding roles.