

## Homily of Fourth Sunday of Easter, Year B, 2024

Acts 4:8-12; Psalm 118:1, 8-9, 21-23, 26, 28, 29; 1 John 3:1-2; John 10:11-18

We have two important celebrations today: Jesus the Good Shepherd and World Day of Prayer for Vocations.

World Day of Prayer for Vocations was introduced by Pope St. Paul VI in 1963 to be a special day of prayer for vocations to priestly, religious, and consecrated life. At the sight of the crowds, Jesus' heart was moved with pity for them because they were troubled and abandoned, like sheep without a shepherd. He instructed his disciples, "The harvest is abundant, but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest." (Matthew 9:37-38). This instruction is for us to continue to pray for an increase in the vocations of ordained, professed, and lay ministries in the Catholic Church. We pray for more aspirants and more candidates to the ministries.

As we celebrate Good Shepherd Sunday, we pray for our spiritual and civil shepherds, and all those who make policies and decisions that affect us. We pray for our parents, who are our first shepherds and our teachers, who are our second shepherds. We pray for those who have, at several times, guided us in one way or another. We pray for our priests, who are with us from Baptism to burial. May our priests continue to "be shepherds with the smell of the sheep" (Pope Francis, 2021). We, also, pray for all of us because we are all shepherds by the virtue of our responsibilities and assignments.

In today's gospel, Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." In the seven verses of today's gospel reading, Jesus mentions "lay down his life" five times to emphasize the importance of what he did for us, and what we also must do as shepherds in different ways and capacities.

Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me." Jesus knows us and wants us to know him. He says, "My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27). To know him means to have an intimate relationship with him. To have an intimate relationship with him, we must hear his voice. To hear his voice means to do what is heard. There are many other distracting voices that want us to hear them: my own voice, voices from the world, and the voice of the Evil One.

A story is told about a poor lady whose two cows were stolen by a rich man who owned fifty cows. Now the rich man had fifty-two cows, and the poor lady had none. The lady reported the matter to the village chief. The village chief said to the woman, "There are many cows in the rich man's ranch, how would you identify yours?" The lady answered, "I know my own cows and my cows know me. I would call them by their names, and they would follow me." The village chief and the lady went to the rich man's ranch where the fifty-two cows were. The lady called the first cow by name. It came to her. She called the second one by name. It came to her.

This story reminds us of Isaiah 1:3, "An ox knows its owner, and an ass, its master's manger; but Israel does not know, my people has not understood."

“When he calls me, I will answer, I’ll be somewhere list’ning for my name....” (Song by Eduardo J. Lango)

Jesus says in today’s gospel that bad shepherds who have no concern for the sheep leave the sheep and run away when they see wolves coming and wolves catch and scatter the sheep. God condemns bad shepherds in Ezekiel 34:6-8, “Woe to the shepherds... who have been pasturing themselves! ... You consumed milk, wore wool, and slaughtered fatlings, but the flock you did not pasture. You did not strengthen the weak nor heal the sick nor bind up the injured. You did not bring back the stray or seek the lost but ruled them harshly and brutally. So they were scattered for lack of a shepherd, and became food for all the wild beasts. They were scattered and wandered over all the mountains and high hills; over the entire surface of the earth my sheep were scattered.”

People fleeing from their homelands, dying across deserts and waters, trafficked and sold, and suffering inhuman hardships as refugees are due to bad shepherds. We pray for the repentance of bad shepherds.

We are all shepherds in different ways and in different capacities by our vocations, professions, and jobs; in our homes, our church ministries, our offices, our business places, our engagements, and our responsibilities. We are invited to listen to the Good Shepherd, know him, and imitate his self-giving and self-sacrificing manner of shepherding. “In your relationship with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5).

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