

## Homily of Fourth Sunday of Easter of Year A

This weekend is the centennial celebration of the apparitions of Our Lady of Fatima, Portugal. Mary appeared to Lucia, Francisco and Jacinta, from May 13 to October 13, 1917. The central messages of Our Lady at Fatima are the call to prayer especially devotion to the Eucharist and to the Rosary, and the call to repentance and conversion. I have not been to Fatima, but I have benefited from Our Lady's appearance there, because part of my childhood formation and spirituality was devotion to Our Lady of Fatima. Every evening we, children, went to a prayer meeting called Block Rosary to sing and pray, and be taught Christian faith. That childhood spirituality is still very much part of me today, and helping me as a Christian and as a priest. We may not be able to go on a pilgrimage to Fatima, but if we observe the messages of Our Lady, we will experience in our homes and our Church the same miracles that take place in Fatima.

Today is World Day of Prayer for Vocations. The United States Catholic Bishops' Conference states, "While appreciating all vocations, the Church concentrates its attention this day on vocations to the ordained ministries (priesthood and diaconate), to the Religious Life in all its forms (male and female, contemplative and apostolic), to Societies of Apostolic Life, to Secular Institutes in their diversity of services and membership, and to missionary life in the particular sense of mission."

God calls, and human beings respond. God still calls in our time as in former times. Unfortunately, lesser number of people answer God's call nowadays to be priests and religious. While God is calling, many other forces are calling too. To hear God and to answer the priestly or religious call, one has to make radical decisions and choices. We continue to pray for priests, religious and deacons, and also that more men and women will make the radical decision to serve God and humanity in God's vineyard. Jesus says in Matthew 9:37-38, "The harvest is abundant but laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest."

Today, also, is Good Shepherd Sunday. Today we pray for religious shepherds: the pope, bishops, priests, deacons, the religious, and shepherds in the making: the seminarians and novices. We pray for political and economic shepherds. The Bible encourages us to pray for them. St. Paul instructs us, "Pray for kings and those in authority" (1 Timothy 2:2). We need to pray for them much more than we criticize them. The president, the house, the senate, judiciary, law enforcement agencies, economic institutions, etc need our prayers because any mistake they make affects us negatively. When they perform well, we will benefit. Some rulers in some countries have led their people astray and to death. Wars and sufferings going on in those countries are because of bad actions by bad shepherds. That is why thousands of people are fleeing from those countries and trying to reach other parts of the world. Many of them die while trying to cross deserts. Many more die while trying to cross seas and oceans. Some of them who survive the horrors of the fleeing suffer rejection on arriving in some parts of the world. There is therefore every reason for us to pray for leaders and rulers.

Our family shepherds: our parents and grandparents need our prayers too that they may be good shepherds of their families. Each one of us is shepherd in our areas of employment, assignment and responsibility. We are to shepherd the people and responsibilities entrusted to us according to the example set for us by Jesus. He was a selfless shepherd, to the extent of laying down his life for us. We are to imitate Jesus and do the same.

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