

Homily of Fourth Sunday of Easter, Year B

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

In today's Gospel Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd." Jesus goes on to describe what a good shepherd does: He lays down his life for his sheep. He knows his sheep and his sheep knows him. This reminds me of the close relationship between masters and their animals. They speak or give signs to the animals and the animals understand and follow instructions. The masters keep watch over the animals and do everything they can to protect their animals from any kind of danger.

Jesus is our shepherd and laid down his life to save us. He speaks to us every time through the Scripture. In John 10: 5 and 27 Jesus says, "They will never follow a stranger; in fact, they run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice." "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me." In Jesus' voice are words of peace, love, faith, healing, unity, mercy, justice, truth, repentance, holiness and eternal life.

There exists, also, the stranger's voice. In the stranger's voice are words of crises, hate, faithlessness, wounds, disunity, anger, injustice, lies, sin and death. Unfortunately, many people listen to the stranger's voice more than Jesus' voice; and as a result, many people are led astray. We are, rather, invited to listen to Jesus, the good shepherd, because his words are spirit and life (John 6:63). The words of the Evil One, the stranger, lead to death (Romans 6:23). These two realities are before each one of us to make his or her choice. May we choose rightly.

I can listen to the voice of Jesus, the good shepherd, positive listening, or listening to the Evil One, the stranger, negative listening. On the importance of positive listening, Pope Francis in his message for 2018 World Day of Vocations says,

"In the diversity and the uniqueness of each and every vocation, personal and ecclesial, there is a need to *listen, discern* and *live* this word that calls to us from on high. ... Nowadays listening is becoming more and more difficult, immersed as we are in a society full of noise, overstimulated and bombarded by information. The outer noise that sometimes prevails in our cities and our neighborhoods is often accompanied by our interior dispersion and confusion. This prevents us from pausing and enjoying the taste of contemplation, reflecting serenely on the events of our lives, going about our work with confidence in God's loving plan, and making a fruitful discernment. ... Every Christian ought to grow in the ability to "read within" his or her life, and to understand *where* and *to what* he or she is being called by the Lord, in order to carry on his mission."

As we celebrate Good Shepherd Sunday, we pray for our spiritual shepherds: the pope, the bishops, the priests and the religious. We pray for our first shepherds, our parents; our second shepherds, our teachers. We pray for our political and economic shepherds. We pray for shepherds in various institutions and establishments. May they all be guided by the voice of the Good Shepherd. Amen.

As we celebrate World Day of Prayer for Vocations, we pray for the priests who have ministered to us throughout our life, both living and dead. We also pray for vocations to priesthood and religious life, and we encourage our young people to consider a vocation as a priest or religious brother or sister. Jesus says, "The harvest is abundant, but the laborers are few, so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest" (Luke 10:2).

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