

Homily of Fourth Sunday of Easter Year B, 2021

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. This is in obedience to Jesus' instruction to 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 even more urgent now because according to Catholic News Service, March 26, 2021, at the end of 2019, the worldwide Catholic population exceeded 1.34 billion. While the world's population of Catholics has shown steady growth, the number of both diocesan seminarians and religious orders' candidates for the priesthood showed a decline worldwide from 115,880 at the end of 2018 to 114,058 in 2019. Therefore, let us continue to pray for an increase in the vocations of ordained, professed, and lay ministries in the Catholic Church.

As we celebrate Good Shepherd Sunday, we pray for our spiritual and civil shepherds; and for our parents who are our first shepherds. 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 has done for us (his crucifixion and death), and what we also must do since we are 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. To know him means to have an intimate relationship with him. To have this intimate relationship, we must hear his voice. He says, "These also I must lead, and they will hear my voice, and there will be one flock, one shepherd." We cannot know him if we do not hear his voice. Hearing his voice means doing what is heard.

Jesus says that bad shepherds are the shepherds who, when they see wolves coming, they leave the sheep and run away, and wolves catch and scatter the sheep. They have no concern for the sheep.

God condemns bad shepherds in Ezekiel 34:6-8, "Woe to the shepherds... who have been pasturing themselves! Should not shepherds pasture the flock? 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. No one looked after them or searched for them. ... my sheep became plunder; ... my sheep became food for wild beasts..."

Bad shepherds are the cause of turmoil and suffering all over the world. People fleeing 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 fulfillment of God's word in Ezekiel 34:10, "Look! I am coming against these shepherds. I will take my sheep out of their hand and put a stop to their shepherding my flock, so that these shepherds will no longer pasture them. I will deliver my flock from their mouths so it will not become their food." In Matthew 9:36, 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. We pray that God's heart be moved with pity for our troubled world.

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 Jesus, know him, and imitate his self-giving and self-sacrificing manner of shepherding. May we all learn from him, the good shepherd. Amen.

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