

Homily of Fourth Sunday of Easter, Year A, 2026

Acts 2:14, 36-41; Psalm 23:1-6; 1 Peter 2:20-25; John 10:1-10

The Fourth Sunday of Easter is Good Shepherd Sunday and World Day of Prayer for Vocations Sunday. As Good Shepherd Sunday, it is a Sunday we reflect on how we listen to Jesus, the Good Shepherd, and follow him. As World Day of Prayer for Vocations Sunday, we pray for more laborers in the Lord's vineyard.

We pray in a special way as in today's Psalm (23), that Jesus the Good Shepherd, shepherds us beyond our wants and beyond our fears, from death into life; and that his goodness and kindness follow us all the days of our lives.

Jesus says in today's gospel, "The gatekeeper (the Holy Spirit or our guardian angel) opens the gate ... and he (the Good Shepherd) calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has driven out all his own, he walks ahead of them, and the sheep follow him, because they recognize his voice. But they will not follow a stranger; they will run away from him, because they do not recognize the voice of strangers" (John 10:3-5). This is what Jesus expects of us. He does not want us to listen or follow the Evil One. The Evil One is the stranger and the thief. He tries to call us, distract us, steal us, and lead us astray. Jesus says, "run away from him." St. Peter says in the second reading that even if we have gone astray, we are to return "to the shepherd and guardian of our souls," that by his wounds we are healed.

St. Peter tells us that Jesus left us an example we should follow: He suffered for others (self-giving and self-sacrifice), "no deceit was found in his mouth," (sincerity and truth), "he was insulted, he returned no insult" (forgiveness and no retaliation), "instead, he handed himself over to the one who judges justly" (surrendering all things to God).

Our responsibilities, positions, professions, and vocations make each one of us a shepherd in one way or another. Therefore, we are to look up to Jesus as our model and imitate him: self-giving and self-sacrifice, sincerity and truth, forgiveness and no retaliation (turning the other cheek), and surrendering all things to God. Let us pray to him for the grace we need in our various shepherding responsibilities and the grace to follow his example.

Jesus says in the gospel, "I am the gate for the sheep. Whoever enters through me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture." May his word be fulfilled in us. May we experience his saving power. Each one of us has the 'pasture' he/she is searching for. May he guide us with his "rod and staff" to find the 'pasture' we are searching for.

We pray that rulers and leaders become 'gates' for their peoples to find 'pasture,' instead of locking the people out and then rob and steal what belongs to their people. Ezekiel says that such rulers and leaders pasture themselves and not the flock (Ezekiel 32:2-6).

On our part, we are called to become gateways through which solutions can be found. Can I be a gateway of relief, or of success, or of healing, or of progress, or accomplishment for someone? Or, am I a wall that stops or blocks advancements and accomplishments?

In the first reading, Peter with the Eleven proclaimed the Crucified and the Risen Lord. Peter's words cut to the heart of the people and they asked, "What are we to do?" We know that often, instead of God's word to cut to the heart of people, God's word is rejected and the messenger receives all kinds of insults. We pray that hearts of stone be replaced with hearts of flesh (Ezekiel 11:19).

On this World Day of Prayer for Vocations, we recognize the fact that while the population of Catholics is increasing worldwide, the number of ministers is decreasing. Which is why 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" (Matthew 9:38). In his World Day of Prayer for Vocations message, Pope Leo addresses young people, "Dear young people, ... Listen to the voice of the Lord who invites you to a full and fruitful life, calling you to put your talents to use and to unite your limitations and weaknesses with the glorious cross of Christ. ... Through the intimacy of his friendship, you will discover how to give of yourselves, whether through marriage, the priesthood, the permanent diaconate, or consecrated life. ..."

Prayer for Vocations (US Conference of Catholic Bishops):

Father, you call each one of us by name and ask us to follow you. Bless your Church by raising up dedicated and generous leaders from our families and friends who will serve your people as Sisters, Priests, Brothers, Deacons, and Lay Ministers. Inspire us as we grow to know you, and open our hearts to hear your call. We ask this in Jesus name. Amen.

Fr. Martin Eke, MSP