

World Day of Prayer for Vocations to the Priesthood and Consecrated Life Sunday 3rd May 2009

Liturgy Notes

Introduction to Mass

Today we celebrate the Fourth Sunday of Easter, also known as 'Good Shepherd Sunday' when we hear the passage in John's Gospel where Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd who lays his life down for his sheep. The reading also reminds us that, as he prepared to ascend to the Father, Jesus entrusted this role of care and leadership to his apostles. This ministry is continued today in Church by bishops, priests and deacons who are called to serve God and His people in a special way.

Today is the annual World Day of Prayer for Vocations to the Priesthood and Consecrated Life and we are invited to join the universal Church in praying for these particular vocations. May many people hear the Lord's call and respond generously.

Penitential Rite

Lord Jesus, you are the eternal priest, who offered your life on the altar of the cross for the salvation of all. Lord have mercy.

Lord Jesus, you nourish your sheep through word and sacrament. Christ have mercy.

Lord Jesus, you are the Good Shepherd who lead us to everlasting life. Lord have mercy.

Or

Lord Jesus you call us to be your faithful people, bearing witness to you in our daily lives. Lord have mercy.

Lord Jesus, are the Way, the Truth and the Life. Christ have mercy.

Lord Jesus you give to the Church various gifts and vocations to further the work of the kingdom. Lord have mercy.

Today's Readings

1st Reading - Acts of the Apostles 4: 8 - 12
This is the only name by which we can be saved.

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, addressed them, 'Rulers of the people, and elders! If you are questioning us today about an act of kindness to a cripple, and asking us how he was healed, then I am glad to tell you all, and would indeed be glad to tell the whole people of Israel that it was by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, the one you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by this name and by no other that this man is able to stand up perfectly healthy,

here in your presence, today. This is *the stone rejected by you the builders, but which has proved to be the keystone*. For of all the names in the world given to men, this is the only one by which we can be saved.'

2nd Reading - First Letter of St. John 3: 1 - 2

Our destiny is to know God fully, to see God as he really is.

Think of the love that the Father has lavished on us, by letting us be called God's children; and that is what we are. Because the world refused to acknowledge him, therefore it does not acknowledge us. My dear people, we are already the children of God but what we are to be in the future has not yet been revealed; all we know is, that when it is revealed we shall be like him because we shall see him as he really is.

Gospel - John 10: 11 - 18

Christ is the Good Shepherd who freely lays down his life for his sheep.

Today we hear Jesus using the image of sheep and shepherds. Unlike a hired hand, whose concern is for himself first, in danger deserting his flock, this caring, undaunted shepherd is in the process of laying down his life for the gathering of his own. There is a trust and intimacy between the sheep and shepherd and Jesus likens this to the relationship between Himself and the Father.

Homily Notes – It's All About Prophets

Why bother being a 'good' shepherd? This might seem like a strange question to us as we naturally link this title with Jesus but in the first century Palestine this would have been an obvious point. Would a 'good' shepherd have received a huge bonus at the end of the year? Would a 'good' shepherd have found the sheep to be much more pliant and so give him an easier life? Would a 'good' shepherd open the possibility of a promotion by his exemplary approach to shepherding? The answer would quite simply have been no. The reason Jesus used this image of the shepherd is that people had such a low expectation of this trade, that to say there might just be one amongst them that could be considered 'good' would have been astounding.

Over the past year our economy has struggled. Many people have often pointed an accusing finger at business people who have, on occasion, been known to celebrate their company's profits by rewarding themselves with huge bonuses. Despite this less than positive situation, the BBC has once again commissioned a TV show entitled "The Apprentice". The programme features the multi-millionaire entrepreneur businessman Sir Allan Sugar who takes a group of men and women and sets them a series of challenges by which they have to make as much money in a particular task as they can. Each week, Sir Allan eliminates a contestant who fails to meet the mark and finally whittles the group down to a final contestant who becomes his apprentice. The expectation is that Sir Allan is looking for a ruthless young money grabber who seeks to win at any cost but fortunately we are constantly surprised. The final two contestants in last year's series Lee and Claire were certainly good at raking in the profits but there was so much more to these two people that made them so appealing. In describing the pair, their fellow contestants described the way that they loved what they did, they were happy, charismatic, and gifted people who galvanised people around them to do their best. In commenting on one of the less successful contestants the comedienne Victoria Wood summarised what it takes to truly be considered as an apprentice:

"The whole point of being clever and dynamic and motivated is that you get a job you enjoy, so that you enjoy your whole life and life doesn't start at six o'clock in the evening."

In this quotation Victoria Wood has hit upon the fundamental way in which Jesus challenged both the people of Palestine and us today. A 'good' shepherd is not someone who is miserable, down cast and a

doom monger. We know this for certain as Jesus is 'The' Good Shepherd upon which all are modelled. In Palestine, it was not a requirement of a shepherd that he be 'good' in order to earn his crust in fact it is not a requirement of any profession, job or trade that you enjoy what you do. However, imagine a world where people did seek to find a way of life that didn't just involve the drudgery of work in the day and pleasure in the evening. A life where you made an active decision not to seek money, power and fame as the ultimate goal but rather sought the opportunity to use your talents in the service of others; a Vocation.

In the Holy Father's Message on the World Day of Prayer for Vocations he notes that when we do have the courage to answer Jesus' call to follow Him we experience

"a mysterious encounter between the love of the Lord who calls and the freedom of man who responds in love, hearing the words of Jesus echoing in his soul, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide"

(John 15:16).

There are many people who answer a particular call to service in the Church such as members of Religious Communities, Deacons and Priests whose lives we especially celebrate during this special day of prayer. There are, however, others such as parents, teachers, medical professionals, married couples, single people and charity workers who also respond generously to His call. You might also be surprised to learn that there will certainly be people who work in business, the media and entertainment who have also responded to Jesus call to follow Him. Jesus does not set limits on who and in what direction he calls us but anyone living a Vocation shares one common feature; their lives bear witness to a common truth that, despite the challenges, they love their calling and love Jesus the Christ who calls them.

Those people courageous enough to answer Jesus call to follow Him today are the true prophets of our modern age. They are not perfect but they seek perfection by hoping to be more Christ like. The fruits of their Vocation are that they are people who show love, sacrifice, joy and hope in what they do and in who they are. Today is an opportunity to reflect on whether you believe life is all about profits with an 'f' or whether you too are being called to live the true life of a prophet modelled on The Good Shepherd?

Prayers of the Faithful *(note to Printer – these should be on a whole page)*

Celebrant We now turn to the Father in prayer, confident that he will hear us and will respond in love.

Reader For the Shepherds of the Church. We pray that Pope Benedict, our bishop N, the priests and deacons of our diocese will be strengthened in their ministry and be ever more faithful witnesses to Christ Jesus. Lord hear us.

We pray for married people and those preparing to celebrate the sacrament of marriage. May their homes and hearts be holy places. Lord hear us.

For parents, teachers and all those who work with young people. We ask the Lord to guide young people as they make important choices in their lives. We also pray Lord hear us.

We pray for young men and women who feel called to give their lives in dedicated service to God and the Church. We ask that they will be guided in their discernment. Lord hear us.

For those in formation to be priests, deacons or consecrated religious. We pray

that they may have the courage to accept the call of God and persevere in their journey. Lord hear us ...

We pray for all those who have died recently and for those who mourn them:

We remember all those in the ordained ministry who served this community over the years and who have died. We also remember all the deceased bishops, priests, deacons and consecrated religious of our diocese. May they rest in peace. Lord hear us...

We ask Mary, mother of Christ our Good Shepherd to pray for us as we say:
Hail Mary ...

[pause]

Celebrant Father, teach us to follow Christ your Son more faithfully. By listening to his voice may we become a community more attuned to your call in our lives. We ask you to hear the prayers we make to you today and to grant them through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

