

## Homily for the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter 2022 Year C

Today is Good Shepherd Sunday, a day which the Holy Father has asked especially for prayers for vocations to the priesthood and the religious life.

Ever since the days when the early Christians painted the image of Christ as the Good Shepherd upon the walls of the catacombs in Rome, this image of Christ as the Shepherd has become a favourite one in Christian circles.

Generations of Christian followers have been strengthened and consoled by the idea of Christ as a Shepherd anxiously seeking out his lost sheep and then carrying them safely home on his shoulders. Christ knows our names, and each one of us is loved as if we were the only one that mattered.

Now Christ continues that role as shepherd by sharing the task with others He has called to love, care and serve his people as priests and religious.

In creating each one of us, God gives us a task, a role, or a purpose in life that has to be lived and fulfilled. This task is consecrated in our Baptism and then strengthened in our Confirmation.

We may not be always aware of it, but who we are and wherever we walk in life we leave the imprint of our presence upon the ground we tread, and upon the lives of others.

As Christians, we are called to a life of loving service to each other in differing ways. One such calling is to the priesthood and the religious life, and ours is now a time when we are in desperate need of these vocations. We need to alert our young people to the crisis which is now upon us.

Youth has always been a time of great generosity, idealism, and hope, and we can see this still in the way that young people give of their time and talents to the deprived groups in our society. In these loud and trying days, it may be more difficult for them to hear the voice of the Lord calling, so it is our responsibility to pray that as they face the decisions about their future role in life, they will leave themselves open to the possibility of a religious vocation and ask God's help to make the right choice in their calling.

There are enormous riches within the hearts of young people, riches that are theirs to spend lavishly during this life.

Many of them are unaware of this gift and never draw on their talents because they are afraid to take the risk of faith which is needed. The world teaches them to aspire to wealth and material things, so it appears to be a huge gamble to focus on a life of prayerful service to God.

This special calling facing them is to be like Christ to others in times of need, to be healers in times of sorrow, towers of strength in times of distress, and a shoulder to lean upon when support is needed. It is to be a shepherd after the heart of Christ.

It is always easier to wash one's hands of the responsibility of proclaiming the Gospel, than to become involved. But the duty of fostering Vocations is the concern of the whole believing community.

We discharge this duty partly by living full Christian lives. But vocations to the priesthood and the religious life do not drop out of the sky. They come from families like yours, where there is a climate created in the home of solid Christian values; where there is the habit and example of prayer; and where encouragement is given to follow the Lord in a special way.

In this day and age, when there has been enormous bad publicity for priests and religious, this requires huge generosity to even contemplate such a life for your child.

Your support is particularly important because your child's faith grows through what it sees of your faith, by the practise of prayer in the church and in the family.

We know that God will always call young people to the priesthood and the religious life: the Church could not survive without them. But if they cannot hear and understand that call, young people will find it very difficult to respond. God does not knock at every door calling to the priesthood and the religious life, but if he happens to knock at your door, will you be generous enough to let Him in?

So, on this Good Shepherds Sunday, let us make the effort to become aware of the responsibility we have for future generations of the church. Remember to pray for more shepherds to care for the whole flock of Christ. And where that seed or vocation springs up in a young heart, encourage it. For the Lord's own promise holds true, that for those who leave all behind to follow Him will be repaid 100-fold, not just in this life, but in the eternal life to come.