

## Homily for the Fourth Sunday of Easter 2023 Year A

Today is traditionally known as 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 picture of Christ on the walls of the catacombs in Rome as the Good Shepherd tending His sheep, the image of the Good Shepherd has been a favourite one for Christians of all times and places.

Generations of Christians have been comforted and consoled by this picture of Christ anxiously seeking out His lost sheep and carrying them home safely on His shoulders.

It is an image that powerfully reminds us of the care, compassion and guidance which Christ offers to all of us.

It gives each one of us that feeling that we are loved, as if we were the only one.

As an image, it is all the more powerful as it was given to us by Christ himself. It is how He sees Himself – “I am the Good Shepherd; I know my sheep and they know me”.

Christ is telling us that He knows us individually and will not let us out of His sight.

Unlike the shepherds of today, the shepherd of Christ's time walked ahead of his small flock, calling each by name to follow him safely into his fold. The sheep knew his voice and they followed him. At the voice of a stranger, they would run away. Christ assures us the shepherd would even lay down his life for his sheep.

With such a loving Shepherd, having a place in His heart should instil hope in us and increase our confidence that, even if sin causes us to wander and stray, if we respond to His voice, then He will bring us back, shoulder high, into the safety and companionship of His fold.

That is one side of the relationship.

What about us? How do we respond in our lives to this new and intimate relationship?

If in His love and care God treats us as His adopted children, is it evident by word and example from our behaviour that Christ is the cornerstone of our lives? Or do we, for our part, keep Him at a safe distance?

In simple terms, the task of every baptised person is to bring to the attention of the community the love that the Father has lavished upon us, by letting us be called God's children.

We are called to live the life of Jesus, to be Christ-like in our behaviour. Not just sheep, but shepherds also. To be loving and caring and draw close to those we meet.

Caring for one another can be shown in little ways: discreet acts of kindness, like writing a letter of sympathy or making a phone call, giving an understanding look or an unexpected gift - all of which says "I am with you always".

Caring as a good shepherd is a hidden source of sensitive communication. It offers hope to a friend, to help them continue on the road of life with a tiny flame of confidence in their heart.

Our invitation through baptism and adoption is to have hands to help others, feet to hasten to the poor and needy, eyes to see misery and want, and ears to hear the sighs of our friends in sorrow.

Those ears are also to be used to recognise and hear the voice of Christ the Good Shepherd, as he calls my name, speaks to me in the privacy of my heart, in the battleground that is often my conscience.

If I hear that Voice and turn to Him, He will safely lead me home.