

3rd Sunday of Easter (B)

22nd April 2018

‘Being good shepherds’

Acts 4: *“Jesus Christ the Nazarene, ... you crucified, ... God raised from the dead”*

Ps 117: *The stone which the builders rejected has become the corner-stone.*

1Jn 3: *when it is revealed we shall be like Him, ... we shall see Him as He really is.*

Jn 10: 11–18: *“I am the Good Shepherd; I know My own and My own know me.”*

I love this 4th Sunday of Eastertide, when each year we have some part of this chapter of St John, inviting to hear Jesus’s lovely description of Himself as ‘the Good Shepherd.’ It’s a beautiful image, and for me one of the loveliest depictions of ‘the Good Shepherd’ is when He is shown with the lamb around His shoulders, safely taking the stray back to the flock, or assisting the weak one which has fallen. This sums up the care and personal attention that Our Blessed Lord takes over each one of us, when we let Him. “I know My own, and My own know Me,” He says. Though Jesus is the Son of God, infinite in power and glorious in majesty, Lord of all, yet He has an individual concern for each one of us. This is a powerful statement of His love for us, and should inspire our love also for Him. As we gaze on Him, this tender and loving shepherd of the flock of the Church, we are moved to follow Him and stay close to Him, for in His care we find safety and peace.

We also are called to be ‘good shepherds.’ We keep this Sunday annually as ‘Vocations Sunday,’ and as well as praying for those whom God calls to Priesthood and Religious Life, we take up our annual collection for the Fund that pays for the seminarians. But there is a wider sense in which we can all be imitators of Christ the Good Shepherd. The charitable way in which Our Lord God treats all mankind as worthy of love and care demands of us that we do the same to one another. We need to accompany the weak and the fallen, and gently to bring back the stray. We cannot adopt a harsh and uncaring attitude to our neighbour, when the very Lord and Creator models Himself to us as a ‘Good Shepherd.’ We also need to show tenderness and care at all times, and to all people, ... though we all know that this can be a huge challenge at times. But relying on our closeness to the risen Jesus in the Church will always help us to mirror this Christian charity to others.

The narrower sense in which ‘Good Shepherd’ Sunday is kept as ‘Vocations Sunday’ is as a day of prayer for all those called to be shepherds of the flock of Christ’s

Church. It was lovely for me to be back at my seminary in Rome a week or so ago, but of course I was visiting on holiday, and one is reminded instead that the seminarians are working hard. I think that each of the three nights I came back in, I found the place already quiet and in darkness! The 6–7yrs that they spend in seminary formation are very full years — happy years, as I experienced them — but full and busy. They deserve our prayers and our wholehearted support as they give up their lives for the flock. They are, rather as Jesus puts it, “laying down their life for the sheep,” not quite in the sense of martyrdom, but by giving up their life, ambitions, careers, families of their own. The sacrifices they willingly make are for the good of us, the Church, to give their lives for the people of the Church, to commit their life’s work to the will of Christ. These men should be loved and supported by us for the ways in which they have offered themselves to the service of the Gospel. They will be the priests who will serve our parishes in the decades to come, and we need their courageous act of service. They have heard the beautiful

call of the Good Shepherd to follow Him in a very special way, but they don’t exist in a vacuum. Vocations to the Priesthood and Religious Life come out of families and parishes which are already living out the imitation of the Good Shepherd. So, if we want to fill the seminary more, to offer to Christ the service of good, holy, young men to be His priests, then we need to sow those seeds here in our own families. As a parish we should dearly love to be able to support the calling of a young man to the priesthood; to assist a young woman to try her vocation in religious life. This should be a constant part of our prayer, but it will only happen if we are diligent about protecting the faith of our youngsters, explaining to them the faith, supporting them in prayer and the sacraments: passing on the faith as the highest priority. We thank God for the men who are giving their lives to be shepherds of the flock, and we commend their sanctity and happiness to the Great and Good Shepherd of the whole Church, Jesus Christ. *Lord, send us holy priests and bless us with the faith to promote vocations amongst the young Catholics of our own acquaintance.*