

Homily April 21/22, 2018
Fourth Sunday of Easter / Good Shepherd Sunday
World Day of Prayer for Vocations

The Fourth Sunday of Easter is also the World Day of Prayer for Vocations. Before I start my homily today, I would like us to take a few seconds for silent prayer to thank God for Fr. Jim and the other priests of the diocese for listening to Him and following their calling to the vocation of the priesthood. Let us also pray for those discerning their priestly vocation, for those in seminary studying to become priests, and for the two men who will be ordained priests in our diocese in May.

Jesus said in today's Gospel reading: "I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." Why did Christ always speak about sheep and shepherds you may ask? A shepherd guarding his flock was well understood by the people in Jesus time. All of them either had shepherds in their family or had a neighbor or fellow townsman who was a shepherd. Everyone understood the dangers wild animals were to a flock of sheep and what the shepherd had to do to protect his flock. They also were aware that hired help was not as devoted to watching over the sheep as their owner, the shepherd, would be.

How can we interpret this passage today, since very few people in Iowa own flocks of sheep and can call themselves shepherds? Who are our shepherds today? The archbishop and priests of our diocese are our good shepherds. These men have given their lives to the Church in the hope of leading all of us: those who are already believers, those whose faith may not be as strong, and even those who currently are not faith filled, to Christ. In a sense, they are laying down their own lives for their sheep. They are helping to lead us, their flock, to the Kingdom of God.

If we listen again to the words of Jesus in the Gospel reading, we hear that He also has other sheep, those that do not belong to this fold. He states that these sheep, he must also lead. When they hear His voice, they will become part of His one flock who follows the shepherd, they will then also follow Christ. These words give all of us hope that those members of our families and extended families who do not routinely attend church services and even those who don't believe; still have the possibility of life forever with Christ, if they turn to Him and listen to what He says.

Even the words we heard in the first Reading today say the same thing. "There is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven given to the

human race by which we are to be saved”, (Acts 4: 12). Jesus is the all-knowing shepherd who guides us, the children of God, to the heavenly kingdom.

Christ, the stone which the builders rejected “has become the cornerstone” of the world. A cornerstone from a builder’s perspective helps to build a strong foundation for any structure. Just as a cornerstone supports a building, having Christ as our cornerstone provides all of us with a strong faith foundation, as long as we believe in Him and follow what he taught us nearly two thousand years ago. Those words he spoke many years ago still should be guiding our own thoughts, words, and actions.

The words we heard in the second reading from 1st John calling us the children of God; truly show us the love that God has for each and every one of us. We truly will not understand how strong God’s love for us is, until it is revealed to us when we reach the heavenly kingdom. On this heavenly journey, we all need to follow our shepherds on earth, our archbishop and priests, so we can reach our shepherd in heaven, Christ Jesus.

I would like to close my homily today with a vocation prayer, since we all need to pray to discern our own vocation in life.

“Prayer to Know my Vocation”

God, my Father,

You created me with a specific purpose for my life; this is my vocation.

By following Your plan, I will be happy on Earth, earn the reward of Heaven, and help others to do the same.

Please help me to hear, understand, and to follow Your call with my whole heart, especially when it seems most difficult.

Mary, Mother of God and my Mother, pray for me to know and accept God’s will for my life. Amen.

Let us all follow the good shepherds in our lives and not the hired hands. May the joy and peace of the Lord be always with you.

Deacon Mark Bortle