

## FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER: GOOD SHEPHERD

SUNDAY: JN 10:11-18 April 25, 2021

On this fourth Sunday of Easter, we hear that Jesus is the Good Shepherd and we are His sheep. In Jesus' time, a shepherd was someone who protected and guided his sheep. Jesus does this for us and so much more. He is the Shepherd that lays down His life for His sheep. This message calls us to reflect inward — do we allow Jesus to shepherd our lives?

This Sunday; the Good Shepherd Sunday, is also known as Vocation Sunday: The Theme that the Holy Father wants us to focus on is a Call to service after the example of ST. Joseph. This year was dedicated by the Holy Catholic Church as a year of St. Joseph.

St. Joseph is the patron Saint of the Universal Church. The Pope tell us that we base our deliberations on our vocations based on the life of St. Joseph. He suggests we use three Key Words: (1) Dream, (2) Service and (3) Fidelity. St. Joseph as you remember in the Scriptures was called to service in a DREAM....He was able to fall through with his dreams. So the Pope asks you and me to think of our dreams. What are our dreams? Are they dreams that are going to help us serve the Church, to serve the world? Are these dreams that will help us to serve with Fidelity in all vocations? Like in the vocation of Marriage, Vocation in Health care industry, or being Priests or Nuns, or teachers or first responders....or in any Vocation in the world.

Let us follow the example of St. Joseph to dream of our vocations....Hope to serve and have steadfast fidelity! Let us NOT be pressured by the pressures of the world. Let's Pray that St. Joseph helps us to serve well in our vocations we are serving in now and pray for those others, especially the young people can serve choose a good dream and serve others with dedication and Fidelity.

In our Gospel this weekend, Jesus reveals His radical love for us. He says, "A hired man, who is not a shepherd and whose sheep are not his own, sees a wolf coming and leaves the sheep...I am the good shepherd... and I will lay down my life for the sheep." Jesus tells us that we are His. We can compare this relationship to that of a loving parent to their child. The parent does not receive payment for nurturing and guiding their child. They constantly give without much in return. And if any evil came near the child, the parent would do anything, even lay down their life for the baby that is their own.

We are Christ's, even more than a child is to a parent. He created us, brought us forth into the world, and sustains our lives each day. Evil persists in our world so Jesus willingly laid down His life for us at Calvary so that we might be saved. He is our Shepherd, whether we remain in His flock or go astray. Whether we accept His care, protection, and guidance or not, He is our Good Shepherd.

But just as a baby is happiest in the arms of a parent, so too are we happiest in the flock of our Shepherd. And just as sheep go astray or try to test their boundaries, we also stray from God, test our limits and even follow false shepherds. Let us look inward and examine our hearts for the times we might have stopped faithfully praying or coming to Mass each week or let money, status, or anything else rule our lives.

Thankfully our Shepherd is a Good Shepherd, and He laid down His life for us knowing every sin we will ever commit. Therefore, let us examine our hearts and return to our flock. We don't even need to find the way. He is right there always waiting to guide us home.

As Peter states in our first reading, "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." Jesus is our true Shepherd. There is no other way to happiness or salvation than to remain in His flock. At times it will be challenging to do so. Complacency and sin are enticing, yet every moment we choose Him or return to Him, we will experience peace and freedom that no false independence will suffice. It is through dependence on our Shepherd that we will become liberated.

Let us look inward this week and ask ourselves, 'who is my Shepherd?' and 'have I gone astray?' Name the areas in your life that you have neglected and ask Jesus to bring you home. Pray for His mercy, seek His forgiveness in the sacraments and begin again. Remember that we are His and He is ready for us to come home, as He says, "I know mine, and mine know me."