

First Communion – 2021

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Today is Vocations Awareness Sunday and today we are reminded how much we need to be grateful for the caring, loving, and faithful shepherding we receive from Christ.

All of us are called to imitate Christ, but some are always being called to more closely imitate Christ the Good Shepherd as priests and deacons and as brothers and sisters in service to the Church in religious communities.

Many times throughout the gospels we are told not to worry and not to be afraid because God loves us and is always with us to guide and to help. While this is comforting to hear, it can be, at the same time, a challenging message for us to live by in these trying times. In today's gospel we are once again comforted and challenged. It is comforting to remember that we are compared to sheep who have a loving shepherd who would lay down his life for his sheep. We are challenged to pray that men and women of all ages will listen for the Lord's call and respond generously and courageously and become the living witnesses to the shepherding care of the Lord that we need in the Church today.

Jesus gives us the model for service in his identification as the Good Shepherd, leading, guiding and protecting his flock. Let us pray today and always for many good shepherds who will care for the flock of the one true Shepherd in our day and time. At the announcements at the end of Mass today, I will share with you a new process that the vocations office of our diocese has set up which will allow you to submit names of persons that you like to see in ministry and leadership in the Church.

Today is also First Communion Sunday here in our parish of Sacred Heart and I would now like to share a few words in the light of today's readings with those celebrating their First Communion. I also want to acknowledge that many of these reflection are taken from a letter that a

college professor who wrote a letter to his son who is also making his First Communion this Sunday.

This father starts off his letter by reminding his young boy that he has been longing for what he was just a young child. Do any of you have any memory of being carried by one of your parents as they came up for Communion and also wanting to receive what they were receiving.

At that time your desire for Communion was matter of imitation more than anything else. As your Mom and Dad received the body and blood Christ, and it was food for them, then you assumed that it should also be food for you.

You were not wrong about that, but the Church in her wisdom made you wait for this day. Over the years your childhood tantrums gave way to much calmer desire of love. You began wanting to receive Holy Communion -- the body and blood of Christ --- not because your parents did, but because you came to recognize who was giving himself to you on that altar.

The words from today's gospel – “I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me.” You likely heard and read these words in the textbook that you were using this past year in preparation for this sacrament. You talked about and reflected on how Jesus, the Good Shepherd loves his sheep so much that he will do anything for them. You came to see that he still does everything to be with us -- giving himself to us in Holy Communion in what looks like bread and wine.

And now on this Good Shepherd Sunday you are invited to a deeper union with him. On this Good Shepherd Sunday you will know him in a new way. You will eat his body and be fed with the most wonderful bread by the Good Shepherd, who laid down his life for all of us.

All of these years your parents called you their beloved child and you will always be so. But your parents also share another relationship with you that is maybe even more important.

Today in the second reading tells us about this relationship. (Do you remember what he said? ---- "you are the _____ of God.") His exact words were: "Beloved, see what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called children of God."

All of us and you yourselves are fellow parishioners of this parish. We are all children of God, baptized into a new life and relationship with Jesus. Jesus, you know is the beloved Son of God the Father. And we are brothers and sisters of Jesus and children of our most loving God.

You probably do not remember when you first started to eat. At that time your parents would take a small piece of food on a fork or spoon and place it on your tongue and you would chew it and eat it. You did this with great trust that we would feed you something that would be good and nourishing for you.

This is the same attitude that we must have as we approach receiving Jesus in Holy Communion. As children of God, we know that our heavenly Father will feed us with something good to eat. In this case it is not just bread or wine that we are to receive. We are to receive him. The Lord of heaven and earth, the creator and redeemer of all wants to be so very close to all of us. So close that he lets us eat his own body, and someday when COVID is gone, drink also his blood.

In the years to come we will explain more to you what all this means and how remarkable it is that God transforms bread and wine into his body and blood for us.

But for now we want you to know this. Know that when you receive our Lord in the Eucharist or Holy Communion, not just today, but for the rest of your life, the Good Shepherd, Jesus, is giving himself to you. To you as a child of God and to all of us as children of God.

See the love that has been poured out on us, as children of such a loving Father. And in response to this great love, how much we need to be loving and give ourselves in service to others as he has done for us.

Sometimes, at the end of Mass we hear the priest say, "The Mass is ended, go in peace."

Actually the Mass is never ended. The Mass goes out and goes on with us as we bring the message God has given and the renewed presence of Christ that we have received out to others all the days of the week.

Today is a great day for you and your family, but it doesn't end here. Rather it is the beginning of new a new and deeper sharing in the life and mission of Jesus.

Our prayer for each of you is that your sharing in Holy Communion from now on will help you grow in your relationship with Jesus and in likeness to his way of life.

We pray this for you and also for ourselves as all have a great responsibility to help and encourage each other in living our faith.

May God bless you greatly on this day and help all of us to be more and more grateful for the great gift of Holy Communion and for all the other helps that gives us in this life.

([Renewal of Baptismal Vows](#) – [Sprinkling with holy water](#) as a reminder of our baptism.)