

Homily for the 4th Sunday of Easter [C] [May 11-2025] Good Shepherd Sunday (World Day of Prayer for Vocations)

Readings:-Acts 13:14, 43-52; Rv 7:9, 14b-17; Jn 10:27-30

My dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ;

The Fourth Sunday of Easter, known as *Good Shepherd Sunday*, is also the “*World Day of Prayer for Vocations*.” Each year on this Sunday, we reflect on the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd, devotedly and kindly taking care of his flock. The title “*Pastor*” means shepherd. A shepherd leads, feeds, nurtures, comforts, corrects, and protects his flock—responsibilities that belong to all Church leaders, parents, civil leaders, and all who are in charge of others.

“LEAD, FOLLOW OR GET OUT OF THE WAY.” On a recent highway trip, one bumper sticker in particular grabbed my eye and caused me to consider its frank command: “*LEAD, FOLLOW, OR GET OUT OF THE WAY.*” —In a sense, the Scripture readings for today, *Good Shepherd Sunday*, offer the same challenge to believers. Christianity admits of no mediocrity. The decision of Faith (which discipleship demands), requires a daily deliberateness and a constantly renewed certainty. Either, Jesus and his way of life are accepted and followed, or they are rejected. There is no middle path; to live otherwise is to become an obstacle in the way of others. — As Christians, each of us is called to be both a leader and a follower. Ultimately, as John points out in the Gospel, our leader is Jesus, the loving shepherd who calls us away from sin and self to union with him and one another. (Sanchez Files)

Important lessons from the scripture readings of the day:- Today’s first reading describes how Paul and Barnabas opted to listen to the voice of Jesus, the Good Shepherd and follow him, and so, to suffer as their Master had done, being rebuffed and rejected by many when they tried to share the good news of salvation. The reading also suggests that the sympathy of the early Christians for the Gentiles occasioned a rupture between those following Jesus and Judaism. The second reading, taken from the Book of Revelation, depicts Jesus as both the glorified Lamb (slain but still standing) and the Shepherd. John’s vision encourages his readers with the assurance that every person who has ever followed Christ and led others to him will share everlasting life with him. The Gospel text offers us both comfort and a great challenge. The comforting message is that no one can snatch the sheep out of his Father’s hands. The challenge is that pastors should be *good*

shepherds to those entrusted to their care, while their flock of lay people should respond by being *good sheep*.

Important points for our personal life and reflection: *Let us become good shepherds and good sheep, good leaders and good followers.*

(1) Let us become good shepherds: Everyone who is entrusted with the care of others is a shepherd. Hence, pastors, parents, teachers, doctors, nurses, government officials, etc. are all shepherds. We become good shepherds by loving those entrusted to us, praying for them, spending our time and talents for their welfare, and guarding them from physical and spiritual dangers. **(2) Let us be good sheep in the fold of Jesus,** the Good Shepherd: Our local parish is our sheepfold, and our pastors are our shepherds. Hence, as the good sheep of the parish, parishioners are expected to **a)** hear and follow the voice of their shepherds through their homilies, Bible classes, counselling, and advice; **b)** receive the spiritual food their pastors provide by regular participation in the Holy Mass, by frequenting the Sacraments, and by attending prayer services, renewal programs, and missions; **c)** cooperate with their pastors by giving them positive suggestions for the welfare of the parish, by encouraging them in their duties, by lovingly offering them constructive criticism when they are found misbehaving or failing in their duties, by praying for them always, forgiving them at need; and **d)** by cooperating in the activities of the various councils, ministries, and parish associations. **(3) Let us pray for vocations to priestly** and religious life so that we may have more good shepherds to lead, feed, and protect the Catholic community.

Gospel exegesis: The context: It was December, wintertime, probably the time of the Jewish Hanukkah festival, the Feast of Re-Dedication of the Temple. [This feast commemorated the triumph of the Jewish commander Judas Maccabaeus over the Syrian leader Antiochus IV Epiphanes in 165 BC).] Jesus was walking in the Temple on the east side, which offered protection against the cold winds from the desert. The Jews had gathered around him. They were not sure whether or not he was the promised Messiah because there were many such wandering preachers and healers in those days. Hence, they asked him directly whether he was the Christ. Instead of giving them an equally direct answer, Jesus claimed that he was the Good Shepherd and explained to them his role.

Shepherds in the Old Testament: In the Old Testament, the image of the Shepherd is often applied to God as well as to the leaders of the people. The book of Exodus represents Yahweh several times as a Shepherd. The prophets **Isaiah and Ezekiel** compare Yahweh's care and protection of His people to that of a shepherd. *"He is like a shepherd feeding his flock,*

gathering lambs in his arms, holding them against His breast and leading the mother ewes to their rest” (Is 40:11). Ezekiel represents God as a loving Shepherd who searches diligently for the lost sheep. Psalm 23 is David’s famous picture of God as The Good Shepherd: “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters; He restores my soul” (RSV, 2nd Catholic Edition). The prophets often used harsh words to scold the selfish and insincere shepherds (or leaders) of their day. Jer 23:1: “Doom for the shepherds who allow the flock of My pasture to be destroyed and scattered.” Ez 34:2: “Trouble for the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Shepherds ought to feed their flock.”

The Good Shepherd in the New Testament: Introducing himself as the Good Shepherd of his flock, Jesus makes three claims in today’s Gospel.

1) He knows his sheep and his sheep hear his voice: Just as the Palestinian shepherds knew each sheep of their flock by its name, and each sheep recognized the flock’s shepherd and his voice, so Jesus knows each one of us — our needs, our merits, and our faults. He loves us as we are, with all our limitations, and he expects us to return his love by keeping his words. He speaks to us at every Mass, through the Bible, through our pastors, through our parents, through our friends, and through the events of our lives. “*God whispers to us in our pleasures, He speaks to us in our consciences, and He **shouts** to us in our pain!*” (C.S. Lewis). 2) He gives eternal life to us, his sheep by receiving us into his sheepfold and giving us Faith through Baptism, then strengthens that Faith in Confirmation. He supplies food for our souls in the Holy Eucharist and in the Divine words of the Holy Bible. He makes our society holy by the Sacraments of Matrimony and the priesthood (Holy Orders). 3) He protects his sheep by placing them in the loving hands of his Almighty Father. Without him to guide us and protect us, we are an easy prey for the *spiritual wolves* of this world, including Satan and his minions.

In chapter ten of John’s Gospel, Jesus adds **two more roles** to those of the Good Shepherd. He goes in search of stray lambs and heals the sick ones. Jesus heals the wounds of our souls through the Sacrament of Reconciliation and strengthens us in illness and old age with the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. Jesus dies for his sheep: Just as the shepherds of ancient days protected their sheep from wild animals and thieves by risking their own lives, so Jesus died in expiation for the sins of all people and in dying and rising again, destroyed sin and death, our enemies!

Through today’s Gospel, Jesus teaches one of the central aspects of the ministerial priesthood: the priest as shepherd. It means that a priest is one

who, by his consecration, lives for others. The title, “*Father*”, like the title, “*Shepherd*,” expresses a relation of loving service to others in everything, from the most sacred ministries to the most trivial duties.

“World Day of Prayer for Vocations.” Today is a day when Christians are invited to reflect on the meaning of God’s call and to pray that they may answer the call to dedicate their lives to serve the Church in a special way, *i.e.*, to shepherd the Church communities, particularly as pastors in their parishes and as superiors in their religious orders or congregations. The Church presents to us in today’s Gospel the figure of Jesus the Good Shepherd that we may reflect on the meaning of the religious vocation to priesthood, diaconate, and consecrated life. Last Sunday we reflected on Our Lord’s commission and charge to Peter, saying once, “*Feed my lambs*,” and twice, “*Feed my sheep*.” In that way he made Peter a shepherd, a pastor. Our Lord continues his work of shepherding his people through Peter and his co-workers (the apostles and disciple), and through their successors, the Pope, the bishops, priests, deacons, catechists, and committed lay people. The first thing we need to remember is that every single person here has a vocation! Each person here, whatever one’s state in life, has been, and is being, called by God through the Holy Spirit to offer one’s special gifts to benefit the rest of the community. Therefore, “**Vocations Sunday**” is not just for the few selected for directly religious vocations; it is for **ALL** of us here. On the one hand, each one needs to reflect on what one’s particular calling is and how one can respond to it for the well-being of the whole parish community. Secondly, one needs to help others, and not be an obstacle to them as they respond to the particular calling and graces that God through his Spirit is giving one. If we will all actively respond to that call what a wonderful community, we will be! For, by God’s grace, “*We are his people, the sheep of his flock.*”

JOKES OF THE WEEK:- A man in an Armani suit, Ferragamo shoes, the latest Polarized sunglasses and a tightly knotted power tie emerges from his shiny silver BMW, approaches a shepherd guarding his flock, and proposes a wager: “*Will you give me one of your sheep, if I can tell you the exact number in this flock?*” The shepherd accepts. “973,” says the man. The shepherd, astonished at the accuracy, says, “*I’m a man of my word; take the sheep you have won.*” The man picks an animal and begins to walk away. “*Wait,*” cries the shepherd, “*Let me have a chance to get even. Will you return my animal if I tell what your job is?*” “*Sure,*” replies the man. “*You are an economist for a government think-tank,*” says the shepherd. “*Amazing!*” responds the man, “*How did you deduce that?*” “*Well,*” says the shepherd, “*you drove into my field uninvited. You asked me to pay you for information I already know, answered questions I*

*haven't asked, and you know nothing about my business! Now **put down MY DOG!***"

Additional anecdotes:-1) 1) **St. Teresa of Calcutta (Mother Teresa)'s Good Shepherd prayer:** During her visit to the United Nations several years ago, Mother Theresa was approached by a diplomat who said, *"I am not a Catholic, Mother. But I want to know: how should I pray?"* The frail little nun took his burly hands in hers and spread out five of his fingers on one hand. "When you pray," she said, *"Think about the many blessings you have received; then, at the end of the day, count out on each finger the words spoken to you by Jesus: 'You.. did.. this.. for.. Me.'"* The diplomat left holding up his hand as though it were a trophy and saying: *"You did this for me."* — In this simple prayer, Mother Theresa let us see the Resurrection as **real**. What she meant was that the love and peace of the Good Shepherd is present to us in the many moments of compassion that bless our lives: in kind words, in the listening ear, in generous actions. Jesus is also present in the blessings we extend to others. The Good Shepherd of today's Gospel guides us every day in our journey to eternal life. (Sanchez Files)

02) "I only know them by name." Tony Campolo loves to tell the story of a particular census taker who went to the home of a rather poor family in the mountains of West Virginia to gather information. He asked the mother how many dependents she had. She began, *"Well, there is Rosie, and Billy, and Lewella, Susie, Harry, and Jeffrey. There's Johnny, and Harvey, and our dog, Willie."* It was then that the census taker interrupted her and said: *"No, ma'am, that's not necessary. I only need the humans."* "Ah," she said. *"Well, there is Rosie, and Billy, and Lewella, Susie, Harry, and Jeffrey, Johnny, and Harvey, and...."* But there once again, the census taker interrupted her. Slightly exasperated, he said, *"No, ma'am, you don't seem to understand. I don't need their names; I just need the numbers."* To which the old woman replied, ***"But I don't know them by numbers. I only know them by name."*** — In today's Gospel Jesus the Good Shepherd says that he knows his sheep by name.