

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTERTIDE (C) 2022

A) INTRODUCTION

- when I was training for the priesthood, I lived in Spain
- on my day off I would enjoy going for a long walk in the country, as I still do
- occasionally I would meet a shepherd with his flock
- and they were on the move, crossing the land, looking for pasture
- what was so striking was that the sheep were not being driven, they were being led
- led by someone whose voice they recognised.

B) JESUS THE GOOD SHEPHERD

- today is Good Shepherd Sunday
- Jesus uses the image of the shepherd to describe himself:
- he takes care of his sheep, he leads them to good pasture, he protects them, he is even willing to lay down his life for them
- in today's Gospel he also says that there is very special relationship between himself and his sheep, between himself and his friends
- The sheep that belong to me listen to my voice; I know them and they follow me.
- Jesus knows each one of us, not just vaguely, but intimately
- he knows us through and through
- and he loves each one of us very much
- he wants us to learn to know him in the same way, to come to know him intimately, to love him very much
- and to follow him, to make his values and his ideals entirely our own.

C) UNIVERSAL CALL TO HOLINESS

- This intimate relationship with Christ is a way of describing the universal call to holiness.
- Every one of us, whatever our state or vocation in life, is called to share in that life and happiness with God, starting now
- Not only are we called to personal holiness, that closeness to and deep friendship with Christ.
- We are also called to share in his work, his mission to the world, to make the love of God visible to those around us.
- That means that every vocation is special, whether it is to marriage, to the dedicated single life, to religious life or priesthood.
- And we have a responsibility to support and promote all those different ways of living out our baptismal consecration.

D) ENCOURAGING VOCATION

- how can we foster priestly and religious vocations within our own families?
- one way is by directly suggesting the idea

-but another way is to help our children to learn and appreciate Christian values.

- here are some suggestions:

- within the family we can try to support all our children's ideas and dreams for the future.

- We can encourage role playing for the young.

- We can watch for Television programmes that present generous and heroic lifestyles.

- We can help children to discover their particular gifts and to compliment them often.

- We can help them to think of the ways in which they can share with others.

- We can discuss with them our own response when a neighbour or relative is in hospital, or has suffered bereavement, lost a job, is housebound and lonely.

- We can make prayer a normal part of family life and of all decision making.

- We can perhaps share with our children how we fell in love.

- We can build the idea of choice, dedication, commitment and perseverance.

- We can try to talk positively about the work of priests and religious.

- We can avoid being destructively critical of the Church.

- We can gently encourage our children to be involved in the parish, as servers, readers, Eucharistic Ministers, and in various social events.

- These are just some of the ways in which we can present the idea of a consecrated life in a positive way.

E) PRAYING FOR VOCATIONS

- Above all we should pray for vocations.

- If we want priests and religious brothers and sisters, then we must pray for them.

- If we want good Catholic husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, then we must pray for them.

- If we want the example of single men and women dedicated to a life of generous service of others, then we must pray for them.

- Why not try to say a prayer for vocations every day?

- Why not offer your Mass and Holy Communion regularly for vocations?

- We can ask our sick and house-bound parishioners especially to pray in that way.

- "Vocations are a gift to be begged for with prayer and merited with holiness of life" (Pope John Paul II).

Lord Jesus, send labourers into your harvest.

Inspire in the hearts of your people vocations to the priesthood and the religious life. Bless our families with a spirit of generosity. May those whom you call have the courage to give themselves for service in your Church, and so help build your kingdom here on earth. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.