

Fourth Sunday of Easter - Good Shepherd Sunday — Fr Ken Schnipke

This weekend we celebrate what's often called Good Shepherd Sunday because of the gospel images of Jesus as the shepherd who cares for us – his sheep. Just as the shepherd was always with his sheep, forming the gate and guarding them with his very life, so too Jesus is the gatekeeper who is always with us, giving his very life as the lamb of God to protect us and keep us safe. Like the sheep who know their master's voice and follow, we too are called to follow the voice of Jesus. And yet, there are many voices in our world today that we can follow. Some voices lead us to what is good, others lead us into ways that are self-centered, hurtful and even destructive. Jesus reminds us that he is the true voice we need to listen to and follow. Thirdly, Jesus is a leader who does not push his followers out into the dangers of the world, but one who leads them with courage and faith. In very simplistic terms, Jesus says a leader must be one who practices what they preach. That means the parent who teaches their children to pray and be good Christians must also take the time themselves to pray and to live what they teach. The priest or teacher who proclaims God's love must also live that love. And the boss who demands a certain quality of work, must also be willing to live up to those standards. Lastly, Jesus is pointing out that he is the gate. He is the one through whom we need to pass in order to find abundant life and our way to the peace and joy of the heavenly kingdom.

While Jesus is our one, true, Good Shepherd, whose voice is familiar and trustworthy, we also know that he puts other shepherds in our lives to help us and guide us. They are those familiar and trustworthy voices who have spoken words of encouragement, love and faithfulness along our way. These parents, teachers, spiritual leaders and mentors have brought us up in the faith, and in their good words and example we first recognized the voice of Christ guiding us to wholeness and holiness. We might take this opportunity to thank these folks this weekend – with a phone call, text or email – for being faithful witnesses of Christ the Good Shepherd by their lives.

In the same way, we might be a shepherd to others – family members, neighbors and friends - who look to us as examples of faith, ones who lead by our lives of witness, ones who point to Jesus, the Good Shepherd. Do our words and example lead others to the heart of Christ? The goal is never to be overly pious nor moralistic, but to be close to the Shepherd ourselves, witnessing joy, expressing gratitude for our deep union with Christ and being ready to help those in need. In doing so, we too may be leading others to the heavenly gate.

This Good Shepherd weekend is also World Day of Prayer for Vocations. We are encouraged to pray that all men and women may listen to the voice of Jesus the Good Shepherd and live the vocation entrusted to them. In a particular way we are called to pray for more shepherds willing to lead our church as priest, brother, sister or deacon. The need for more shepherds in our church is obvious and growing, here in the local area as many parishes cluster, throughout the archdiocese of Cincinnati, the US and in other countries around the world. An important dimension of every vocation is that it is meant to be joyful and fulfilling. Jesus speaks to this in the end of today's gospel when he says that those who come to him will have life abundantly. Whether a vocation in the church, to the married life or as a single person, our vocation in life is not meant to be something we merely settle for, a last resort. Rather, God wants us to be joyful in this world, even amidst the struggles that are part of everyday life. My hope and prayer is that all of us can find joy in the vocation God has entrusted to us.

We pray that Jesus our Good Shepherd will be close to in this time of danger and pandemic, guarding us with his very life. We pray that we may listen to his voice among all echoing around the world, and trust that he will show us the way to wholeness and health.

2020 World Day of Prayer for Vocations - The World Day of Prayer will be observed on Sunday, May 3rd, also known as "Good Shepherd Sunday." The purpose of this day is to publicly fulfill the Lord's instruction to, "Pray the Lord of the harvest to send laborers into his harvest" (Mt 9:38; Lk 10:2). Please pray for priests, deacons, religious brothers and sisters who have ministered to you throughout your life, both living and dead. Please pray that young men and women hear and respond generously to the Lord's call to the priesthood, diaconate, religious life, societies of apostolic life or secular institutes. You can find many resources to promote a culture of vocations on the **USCCB Vocations webpage** (www.usccb.org/vocations).

