

Dear Friends,

Today we celebrate the 4th Sunday of Easter, also known as **“Good Shepherd Sunday.”** On this Sunday every year the Gospel invites us to reflect upon Jesus as the Good Shepherd.

The image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd is not an idyllic one. Palestinian shepherds were responsible for every sheep entrusted to their care; “good” shepherds, motivated by responsibility rather than money, considered it a matter of honor to lay down their lives for the sheep in their charge, taking on every wolf, wild beast and bandit in defense of the flock. This is the type of shepherd Jesus committed himself to be. He is willing to protect his sheep even to the point of risking his own life. His is an intimate relationship with them based on the intimate relationship he has with his Father. It is this vocation of being “good shepherds” to which Christ calls us.

Peter is a good example of someone who grew into his role as a good shepherd. Peter, as we know, was the first to confess Jesus as the Messiah, but in the beginning he didn’t fully understand what **“the cross”** meant. Peter also wasn’t afraid to ask Jesus questions: **“We have left all to follow you. What is there for us?”** (Mt. 19:27). He also told Jesus that he would never let him wash his feet; only a few hours later he denied even knowing Jesus. He is the same Peter, however, who in today’s reading from the Acts of the Apostles boldly preaches Jesus as raised from the dead for the salvation of all people. It is a message he will continue to proclaim until that day in Rome when he sheds his blood for Christ. Like Jesus, the original Good Shepherd, Peter lays down his life for others.

Every year on **Good Shepherd Sunday** the Church observes **World Day of Prayer for Vocations.** On this Sunday we pray that the Lord will raise up more young men and women to be good shepherds after him as priests, consecrated religious and deacons. It is the Gospel image of the Good Shepherd to which they are being called, an image that looks beyond one’s own needs, expectations and fears in order to become “shepherds” of service, reconciliation, compassion and charity to others.

On this **World Day of Prayer for Vocations**, let us commit ourselves to both praying for vocations and to talking and encouraging our young people to follow Christ as good shepherds.

Peace and blessings,
Fr. John