

## Easter IV- Good Shepherd Sunday- Vocations

One of the oldest paintings of Christ, in the Roman catacombs-St. Callistus, represents Christ as carrying the injured, straying sheep gently on His shoulders back to the sheepfold. This is an image of Christ which has always appealed to Christians. We have Christ as our good shepherd: who is sincerely interested in the true welfare of His flock, and we have reason to rejoice. Gospel teaches us that Jesus knows each one of us by our name, he knows our needs, our merits and our weaknesses.

This fourth Sunday of Easter is known as *Good Shepherd Sunday*. It is also the *World Day of Prayer for Vocations*. The scripture lessons are about shepherds. Each year on this Sunday, we reflect on the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd, devotedly taking care of his flock. It is interesting to note that Jesus, by birth is a carpenter. His disciples were mostly fishermen. Then why Jesus chose the image and name “Shepherd” to qualify himself?

It’s very common in Bible to use the term “sheep” to refer to the *people of God*. The ‘collective sense and innocence’ of sheep might have inspired to this. But if we observe closely the sheep, we are able to find a couple of other particularities about them.

- a) It’s easy to train other animal to use for entertainments, but very rarely-sheep; because its *hard to train them*: they love to do what they want; Even after continuous exhortations, the people of God, choosing their own likes and wishes, can easily resemble to the sheep.
- b) Sheep is one of the animals having the *shortest of eyesight*. They can see clearly only a few meters ahead. That is why, once missing the group, they easily miss the way and go astray. Actually, it’s the shepherd, who functions as the eye of the sheep.
- c) The capacity for *self defense is lowest* in the sheep. At the face of difficulties, they can only run to escape. Being very weak to defend itself, it’s the shepherd who is the true defence and protection for them.

As the sheep seems so weak not to have a safe life without the shepherd, the scripture tells us the great truth that *man cannot live safe without God*.

There are many among us today who think they need no shepherd. They think they know all the facts of life while they are in total ignorance of the most basic fact of all, namely, the very purpose of life. These straying sheep may boast of their false freedom and of the passing joys they may get in this life. What will be their fate when they meet Christ the Judge, whom they had refused to follow and acknowledge during their days on earth?

Without Jesus the Shephard, to guide us and protect us, we are easy prey for the *spiritual wolves* of this world. Jesus alone heals the wounds of our souls. He is the one who goes in search of his stray lambs and heals his sick ones, saves them at any cost, even at the risk of his own life.

Lastly, all of this is intimately linked with the second theme of this Sunday- "*Vocations Sunday*". On this day we are especially asked to pray that the Church may be provided with good shepherds needed to lead and guide the people of God in work of the Gospel. We may be tempted not to see ourselves as included. You may pray earnestly for more young people to offer themselves as priests and religious but clearly exclude your own children.

Let us not limit 'vocation' to a calling to be a priest or a member of a religious institute. But, in fact, every single one of us has a vocation. For most of you, probably, it is what you are now doing be it as spouses, parents, teachers, doctors, civil servants, business-person or whatever.

The Good Shepherd, who laid down His life for the sheep, He is risen. Alleluia!

To the First Communion Children: "I have come that you may have life, life in abundance": Jesus brings you new life in abundance!