

4th SUNDAY OF EASTER;(Good Shepherd Sunday); Cycle – B; April 21st 2024
Acts 4:8-12; 1 John 3:1-2; John 10: 11-18

Dear Sisters & Brothers,

Perhaps, you know that every year the 4th Sunday of Easter is celebrated as the Good Shepherd Sunday, no matter what liturgical cycle we are in. Though Jesus had told many parables in the synoptic gospels he never uses the shepherd imagery in them. Only in John chapter 10 he takes the imagery of a shepherd in which he makes it very clear that indeed, he is the Good Shepherd. So in every liturgical cycle, on this Sunday we hear John chapter 10. This year we are given part of it starting from 10: 11-18. Jesus likes to call himself the Good Shepherd for the very reason that in the Old Testament God is addressed as the Good Shepherd of Israel. Psalm 23 is the clear example of that. People of Israel called God their Shepherd and the Kings and religious leaders too as their shepherds.

Today is also the *World Day of Prayer for Vocation* and the faithful are invited to reflect on God's call and pray for vocation to priesthood and promote it. Indeed, all the disciples of Jesus share his priesthood. But, the importance of ministerial or ordained priesthood in the Church should not be overlooked. Without the ordained ministers the very Eucharistic existence of the Church is in grave danger. Currently, most of the dioceses in the country are struggling to have enough priests to fill the vacant parishes. The lamentation of Jesus is true in the modern age, **“The harvest is plenty but the laborers are few.”**

In the light of the true qualities of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, all the pastors, parents, teachers and political leaders who are called to be the shepherds of the people are invited to make self-examination of their service and see how faithful they are to their roles. The faithful also need to examine and see how they promote the vocations, instead of blaming the bishops for closing down their churches. In this beautiful imagery of the Good Shepherd Jesus clearly calls him: **I am the Good Shepherd**. Though the shepherds in Palestine didn't enjoy any social or legal status, their selfless dedication in the care of the sheep and the sacrifice they made to protect the sheep, made them the icons of pure self-giving love and sacrifice. Jesus could claim that he has all the qualities of a good shepherd, for he even laid down his life for his sheep. In the Old Testament God blamed the political and religious leaders for their poor shepherding of the people. Jesus too condemned the religious leaders of his time for the scandalous life they led.

Today Jesus expects the same qualities especially, from all the shepherds of the Church, starting from the Pope down to the priests and deacons, parents, teachers and

political leaders who are entrusted with the care of the young and old. A true pastor will never see his priesthood as a profession or career; rather a **vocation** from God to serve the people. When a pastor acts like a hired servant, he will not have time for his flock and will never care for his people. Then all sorts of evils will creep into his life which will also reflect on the community and his people will be misled. **I would like to quote the words of the great writer, Baptiste Chautard who mentions in his book, *The Soul of the Apostolate*, “If the priest is a saint, the people will be fervent; if the priest is fervent, the people will be pious; if the priest is pious, the people will at least be decent; if the priest is only decent, the people will be godless.”**

So it is true, the spiritual generation is always one-degree less intense in its life than the one who begets it in Christ. Of course, all the priests who serve the communities are called to be good example or role models; they are supposed to be holy. Their good life should bring more people back to Jesus. The parents and teachers should be role models to the children and the political leaders should stand for justice and morality of the citizens.

Very often more than anyone else the priests are targeted and criticized. At the same time, please remember, the only one who descended from heaven is Jesus Christ, the Holy One of God. But the priests do not descend directly from heaven. Every priest is born in the world and is part of the society and culture in which he is brought up. He is the product of his community. Naturally, the face of that society will reflect on the life of the priest. The society has got a great role to play in the formation of the character of its members. A priest coming out of a morally sound society or community will be a person of values and character. The family is the first seminary of the priestly candidate and his parents are the first teachers. The good qualities or the bad qualities of a priest are mostly the ones he inherited from his early life. Again, the parish community should never expect its priest to be angels or supernatural. The timely correction, love, encouragement and prayers of the community are very essential for the spiritual and mental growth of its priest. Today in many countries the priests and missionaries are physically attacked and even killed. The other day a bishop in Australia was stabbed by a terrorist while he was preaching. Despite the threats, if young men come forward to become priests, it means they see something very attractive in the call of Jesus. Please keep all the priests and missionaries in your daily prayers so that they may be courageous to stand for Jesus.