

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER [GOOD SHEPHERD SUNDAY]

THEME: I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD

The fourth Sunday of Easter is known as Good Shepherd Sunday and the World Day of Prayer for Vocations. Each year on this Sunday, we reflect on the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd, devotedly taking care of his flock.

The priest in charge of a parish is called a “pastor” because pastor means shepherd, and he shepherds Christ's flock. As a shepherd, he leads, feeds, nurtures, comforts, corrects, and protects Christ's flock in his parish. The earliest Christians saw Jesus as the fulfillment of the ancient Jewish dream, of a good shepherd.

It is against this background, that we must pay attention to our Gospel passage today. Jesus says “I am the gate for the sheep, whoever enters through me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture”.

Our first reading today, describes Peter’s first sermon on Pentecost day. He reminded his listeners, that they have crucified their true shepherd. So, they need to receive the forgiveness of their sins, by getting baptized and acknowledging Jesus as their shepherd and savior. He also encouraged the suffering Christians in our second reading, to follow the footsteps of Jesus their Good Shepherd, realizing the truth that, it is his suffering and death that have enabled them to become more fully the children of God.

My dear friends in Christ what should be our response? We need to be good sheep in the sheepfold of Jesus, the Good Shepherd: Our local parish is our sheepfold. We have to always hear and follow the voice of our Good Shepherd, through homilies, Bible studies, counseling and advice from our priests.

We also need to be good shepherds in the different capacities God has placed us. Everyone who is entrusted with the care of others is also a shepherd. Hence, pastors, parents, teachers, doctors, nurses, caregivers, government officials and politicians are all shepherds. Since shepherding a diocese, a parish, a civil community or a family is very demanding, dedication, commitment, sacrifice and vigilance are needed every day on the part of the shepherds.

We become good shepherds by loving those entrusted to us, praying for them, spending our time and talents for their welfare, and guarding them from physical and spiritual dangers. As we celebrate Mother’s Day, parents are also reminded of the need to be careful of their duties as shepherds for their children, by leading exemplary Christian lives and so become role models for them, by teaching and protecting them in body and soul.

Last of all, we need to pray for more vocations to priestly and religious life, so that we may have more holy and spirit-filled shepherds, to lead, feed and protect the Catholic faith. On this World Day of Prayer for Vocations, we are asked to encourage and pray for our young men and women, to respond to God's call to serve his Church, in the priesthood and religious life.

