

REFLECTION FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER REFLECTION 2021

Acts 4:8-12 1John 3:1-2 John 10:11-18.

The Fourth Sunday of Easter is World Day of Prayer for Vocations. Today, the Church calls us to reflect on the meaning of God's call for each of us and to pray for vocations to the priesthood, the diaconate and the consecrated life, because the entire Christian community shares the responsibility for fostering vocations.

Today is also called Good Shepherd Sunday. Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd, the gathering one, the welcoming one, the one who leads, nurtures, guides, feeds, comforts, supports, protects, and saves.

In doing so, Jesus invites us, valued members of his flock, to listen to Him, to follow Him and He will lead us to abundant life, eternal life.

From the moment a child is born, mothers listen to their child's voice. Mothers can tell whether their child is frightened or hopeful. Mothers can tell from their child's voice whether they're lying or telling the truth. Even if many children are making noise, a mother will still be able to pick up their own child's voice out of the crowd because you have been lovingly listening to that voice for years.

Jesus says the sheep follow the authentic shepherd because they recognise His voice – that voice leads them to safety, shelter and nourishment and they run away from strangers because they don't recognise their voices.

The challenge is this- there are imitators, imposters, and deceivers out there in our world that try to take the place of the Good Shepherd. There are many voices in our world clamouring for our attention, making demands of us, extending empty promises to us. There are deceivers calling you down the wrong path. There are voices out there which demean life, which destroy human dignity, which trivialise relationships and faithfulness.

Through scripture reading and prayer life over the years, I have learned a few patterns, patterns which help me to discern whether I am hearing the voice of Jesus or whether the message is coming from somewhere else. And I humbly want to share it with you.

I have learned that Jesus speaks to us through the promptings of our conscience (our conscience is the voice of God within us) and through the voice of the needy- if we are willing to listen.

Jesus also speaks to us through the beauty of creation, music, and through the people that we love, especially when they tell us the truth.

My dear people of God, I can assure you, when Jesus speaks to you, he will always speak a message of mercy, forgiveness, love, peace, self-giving, sacrifice, faithfulness, truth, abundant life, eternal life.

+If the voice you hear leads you to embrace life, to treasure life, to celebrate life, to protect life, then chances are that you're hearing the authentic voice of Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

+If the voice you hear in prayer calls you to be generous and self-transcending then it's probably from the Lord. But if the voice calls you to selfishness and self-centeredness, well that can't be from the Lord.

+If the voice you hear in prayer calls you to be faithful, to be true to your word, to keep to your promises, it's probably from the Lord. If the voice invites you to break your promises and to lie, then that is probably an imposter.

+If you hear in prayer an invitation to spend more of your life focusing on others, to become a blessing in someone else's life, that is probably a message from the Lord.

+If the voice you hear calls you to be a peacemaker, a justice-doer, a hope-giver, then I believe that's from the Lord.

+If you hear an encouragement to treasure life, to set aside your anger, to forgive and then to forgive more –I believe that's from the Lord.

+If the voice you hear tells you to give up, that you're not worth it and that there is no hope for you - it is lie from a liar.

+If the message you receive in prayer tells you that you're deeply loved by Jesus who was willing to die for you and that you have a dignity that no one can take away from you – then that voice is from the Lord.

Everyone who is entrusted with the care of others is a shepherd. Our society is bleeding today because some of us who are political leaders, church leaders, teachers, parents, doctors, nurses, lecturers, public servants, artisans, employers and employees or caregivers, work only for material reward and not for the well-being of those placed under our care.

And all those in leadership positions who abuse their position for their selfish interest or fail to carry out their responsibility, let us all down, they give us all a bad name. We need a total rethink on the meaning of leadership.

We become good shepherds by loving those entrusted to us, by praying for them, spending our time, talents, and blessings for their welfare. It is a magnificent vocation to love and care for others and be a channel of God's blessing.

A Good Shepherd is like a candle, it consumes itself to light the way for others. May we, like Christ the Good Shepherd, lead others by our exemplary lives; serve them, feed them, nurture them, guide them, comfort them, protect them, love them, pray for them, support them, encourage them and be a blessing to them.

The Lord is our shepherd; there is nothing we shall want. Surely goodness and kindness shall follow us all the days of our life. In the Lord's own house shall we dwell for ever and ever. Amen

Fr Patrick