

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER - B 2021

In today's Gospel Jesus tells us: "I know my sheep and they know me."

Most of us first came to know the Lord from our parents or grandparents.

As the Rite of Baptism of Children puts it: "Parents are the first teachers of their children in the ways of faith."

To "know" Jesus implies that we grow in our friendship with him.

This friendship is nurtured through the witness of dedicated lay persons such as Catholic school teachers and faith formation catechists.

As we gather on this "Good Shepherd Sunday" we are reminded that priests, deacons, and religious men and women have a particular vocation to continue the mission of the Good Shepherd, helping us to know and love Jesus.

Religious men and woman witness to Jesus through their community life and prayer, and in various ministries such as in our schools and hospitals.

Deacons witness to a life of service in the Church by assisting at the altar, proclaiming the Gospel, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and reaching out to the poor.

They can also preside at Baptisms, Weddings, and the Rites of Christian burial, and they often help coordinate various ministries within the parish.

Priests are ordained to act in the person of Jesus the Good Shepherd in a myriad of ways:

First and foremost, they preside at the Mass, standing in the place of Christ our High Priest who makes himself present to us in the Holy Eucharist.

Priests preach, hear confessions, anoint the sick, and act as the ordinary minister of Baptism and presider at weddings.

Another very important ministry performed by priests, as well deacons, is to pray with the dying and their families, preside at funeral rites, and console the bereaved.

Priests also help their "sheep" come to know Jesus and deepen their relationship with him through teaching, spiritual direction, and sacramental preparation.

Of course, priests administrate parishes as pastors - that title coming from the Latin word for "shepherd."

And as pastors, priests have a special responsibility to pray every day for their parishioners and for the whole flock of Christ.

In all of this priests are called to witness to the love of Jesus and the values of the Gospel, laying down their life for their sheep after the example of Jesus the Good Shepherd.

3

These responsibilities may sound daunting, and young men might be hesitant to picture themselves as priests or deacons, but I can tell you that it is an exciting and fulfilling adventure to dedicate one's life to.

And it is so important to remember that the God who gives the call to the priesthood, diaconate, and religious life will also give the graces to fulfill this vocation.

Sometimes a young person will say, "I'm not holy enough."

I remind them of how Jesus responded to Peter when he said, "Leave me, Lord, I am a sinful man."

Jesus looked into Peter's eyes and told him, "Do not be afraid. From now on you will be a fisher of souls."

Jesus says the same thing to everyone he is calling to the priesthood, diaconate, and religious life: "Do not be afraid."

Secular culture does not support the idea of someone dedicating their life to the service of God, so it is up to us as Catholics to provide this support, especially the parents of our young people.

Encouraging vocations to the ordained ministry and religious life is fundamental to the life of the Church.

Each of us should be praying every day that those whom God is calling will say "yes" to the Jesus' invitation to follow Him. A vocations prayer card is included in your order of service; please take it home and use it frequently.

And please pray for the perseverance of our seminarians who have already answered the call.

We are currently recruiting members to join our parish's new Vocations Committee.

If God tugging at your heart to become involved in this important ministry please come and speak with me.

We are also beginning a specific ministry of prayer for vocations through the use of the Vocation Cross.

We are asking people (individuals, couples, or families) to take the Vocation Cross home and use it as a focus of prayer for a week.

A variety of helpful materials accompany the Cross to assist you in praying for vocations.

You can sign up in the back of the church to "host" the Vocation Cross. I hope that everyone will consider taking the Cross for a week.

And as we pray for new workers in the flock of the Lord, please pray for the priests, deacons, and religious who currently serve in our Diocese.

I receive great encouragement every time someone tells me that they are praying for me. My response is always: "Thank you, I need it!"

I am very grateful for all of you who go out of your way to express your gratitude and support.

And know that I hold you in my daily prayers.