

DIOCESE OF NORTHAMPTON



GOOD SHEPHERD SUNDAY PASTORAL LETTER 2018

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

On this Good Shepherd Sunday in the Diocesan Year of Prayer and Vocation, we are invited to listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd, and to respond to his call.

That call, first of all, is a call to live a holy life. Almost as if to help us in our Year of Prayer and Vocation, Pope Francis has issued an Apostolic Letter on the call to holiness in today's world. Pope Francis writes, "I like to contemplate the holiness present in the patience of God's people: in those parents who raise their children with immense love, in those men and women who work hard to support their families, in the sick, in elderly religious who never lose their smile. Very often it is a holiness found in our next door neighbours, those who, living in our midst, reflect God's presence."

All of you sitting in church right now have a vocation to holiness, each in a different way is called to reflect God's presence. For that to happen, we have to open our hearts in prayer to God's presence. That does require some effort. Pope Francis emphasises that we have to work to cooperate with God's grace, and we have to combat our selfishness and all that takes us away from walking humbly with our God.

Our vocation, as brothers and sisters of Jesus, requires a conscious commitment. But how many of us run away at the thought of commitment. Mistakenly, we think that a commitment restricts our freedom. But commitment gives meaning and value and direction to our lives. And it is a response to God's commitment to us. As St. John writes in today's second reading, "Think of the love the Father has lavished on us by letting us be called God's children; and that is what we are." (1 John 3:1). Jesus himself in today's Gospel speaks of his commitment – "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd is one who lays down his life for his sheep." (John 10:11)

As people with a sense of vocation, we are asked to pray especially today for vocations to the priesthood, to the permanent diaconate and to the religious life. I have to confess that I am praying, in particular, for those men whom God is calling to the priesthood, including our eight students in the seminaries.

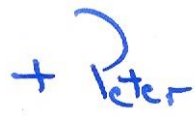
At the Chrism Mass before Easter, I reflected on how fifty years ago this year I stood at the sacristy door waiting to process out for the Mass of Ordination wondering whether God was really calling me to serve him as a priest? I shudder to think how I preached as a twenty-four-year-old. But then I shudder now! My commitment then and now is only possible with God's grace.

So now I want to encourage men to be brave at a time when commitment is not fashionable, and to put their trust in God. The vocation of the priest to gather together God's people, to preach and teach the Word of God, to celebrate the Mass and the sacraments, to be the shepherd of the flock on our pilgrimage to heaven is a wonderfully rich calling – a calling which is only possible with the gifts of the Holy Spirit with which the priest is anointed at his ordination. There is no need to be afraid. It is God who is calling. And you will be joining a brotherhood of great priests in our Diocese.

It is true for us all that God the Father takes the initiative in our lives, that his Son, the Good Shepherd, accompanies us, and that the Spirit guides us.

May Mary, our Mother, pray for us all, saints and sinners, and intercede for those whom God is calling to the priestly service of her Son, the Good Shepherd. Amen.

With every blessing,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a cross symbol followed by the name "Peter".

Bishop of Northampton

*To be read and/or made available at all Masses of
the weekend of the 21/22 April 2018.*