

Fourth Sunday of Easter: Good Shepherd and Vocations Sunday

With the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost Peter and the Eleven discover their vocation very immediately and very powerfully. Their vocation is to proclaim Truth and the Good News, and as we have seen over the last few weeks, once they have been convicted of this Truth then there is no stopping them proclaiming the Truth – The Truth being a Person - Jesus Christ.

Peter and the Eleven having walked with Jesus for three years and having been set free in the Power of the Holy Spirit know without a shadow of doubt what they have to do now – they have to invite all that they meet, into that same place that they have found; the place that is their true home. Home not being so much a physical place in the world but a spiritual reality in the Kingdom of God.

Peter calls the assembled people to repentance, for on a certain level to repent is to return home. Home, that place where we find true acceptance, love and truth: a place where we have the freedom to discover our real vocation in life. It is in acknowledging our sins and failings in the truth that the Lord Jesus is calling us back to Himself, back home, that we can live a life of Holiness – that ultimate vocation in life – as we read in the Second Reading from St Peter, 'He was still bearing our faults in His own Body on the Cross, so that we might die to our faults and live for holiness.' How amazing is that – there is no condemnation in Christ about our sins and faults, but only an acceptance and a forgiveness; Jesus makes it so easy to come back home – to repent – let's not forget the parable of the Prodigal Father! And as St Peter further reminds us in his letter, not only does Jesus receive our sins and faults but he fully heals them 'through His wounds!'

We just need to turn around, repent as it were, and see The Lord standing there to recognise that we are already at home with The Lord, let us not waste time trying to justify any of our sins or faults, for The Lord has already dealt with them – let us just say sorry and get on living as He intended - for Jesus says in the Gospel today, 'I have come so that they (you and me) may have life and have it to the full.' Jesus wants us to live that universal call to Holiness and Mission: for this is our vocation in life.

This calling to Holiness and Mission is lived out in so many different ways – the Church recognises four broad areas of Vocation. Priesthood, Religious Life, Marriage and the Single Life. Jesus in today's Gospel promises us that if we not only follow Him but live in Him, if we enter fully into the Sheepfold through the gate that is Jesus Christ, then not only will we find our true home in the Sheepfold, we will also be fully protected as we live out our Vocation in life. So what does a call to holiness and mission look like?

It's following the voice of the shepherd – who leads at the front of his flock. So, do we know the voice of The Lord Jesus in prayer? Do we know Jesus in the Scriptures – which is the Voice of God. Do we live inside the Sheepfold of Jesus' protection and true life? Or do we listen to lies, tittle tattle and gossip? Do we live in a worldly way that Jesus would not recognise as his home? For as the psalmist reassures us, 'The Lord is my shepherd: there is nothing I shall want.' It's not easy to live a life of holiness, especially when St Peter reminds us that the one we are to follow, when he was insulted did not retaliate with insults. And, 'The merit, in the sight of God, is in bearing punishment patiently when you are punished after doing your duty,' Something Jesus and the Apostles knew only too well as they lived out their call to Holiness and Mission.

This is why we need the protection of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit as we live in Truth and proclaim Truth in the world, and why we need to constantly come back Home – to the Sheepfold that is the love and protection of Christ – a place where we are accepted and loved and discover truth, the truth that Jesus is the Shepherd and Guardian of our souls.

We too are caught up in this guardianship of souls within our vocations in life: couples are called to help their spouses to live a life of holiness within the security of the Sheepfold of their love, parents are called to guide their children into the Sheepfold that is Jesus The Lord.

Religious are called to guide the people they live amongst and pray for and with, into the Sheepfold that is the Lord through the particular charism of their founders.

As a priest I am called to 'have care for souls under my care' – within the Sheepfold of parishes and beyond of course - to bring people back home to the Lord through Preaching and the Celebration of the Sacraments.

So, on this Vocations Sunday I do ask for your prayers for all Vocations but especially for the increase in vocations to the Priesthood and Religious Life, so that we can in particular as priests and religious bring people back home through our Witness to the Truth - in how we live out our call to Holiness and Mission.

And, let us pray and give thanks for all Vocations Teams, that they too may always be fully alive in The Lord. Amen.