

4th Sunday of Easter - A
Acts 2:14a, 36-41;
I Peter 2:20b-25;
John 10:1-10
Little Flower - 5/3/20

My Brothers and Sisters,

The Fourth Sunday of Easter is often called Good Shepherd Sunday because the Gospel on this Sunday always comes from the chapter of John's Gospel in which Jesus proclaims himself the Good Shepherd. For the same reason, today has also been designated as the World Day of Prayer for Vocations. Each of today's readings has a message for each of us.

Pope Francis consistently reminds us that the Church is called to be a missionary Church. Jesus began his ministry proclaiming the coming of God's kingdom and calling people to repentance and faith. After Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension, Peter proclaimed the crucified Jesus as Lord and Christ and called the people to conversion and baptism. If we are going to be a missionary church, all of us must proclaim and live the Good News of Jesus Christ and invite others to conversion, faith, and baptism through our words and deeds. The Church cannot be effective as a missionary Church without the missionary activity of both priests and parishioners.

It seems to me that today's second reading has special importance for us during the coronavirus. Peter wrote, "*If you are patient when you suffer for doing what is good, this is a grace before God.*" Today all of us are suffering in one way or another because of the coronavirus. Besides those who have become ill or lost loved ones, many have lost income or jobs. For most, the pandemic has taken a mental, emotional, spiritual, and/or relational toll. For all of us, our freedom has been restricted. Over the last couple of weeks, we have seen that many people are becoming impatient with the restrictions and reacting with anger and hostility.

Although we are not necessarily suffering for doing good, I would suggest our sufferings are still a grace before God. Dr. Martin Luther King once suggested that unearned suffering is salvific. I would suggest that unearned sufferings such as this pandemic, if borne in love and patience, will be salvific not only for us but for others.

Finally, in today's Gospel Jesus describes himself as the shepherd, the gate keeper, and the gate. Jesus concludes by proclaiming "*I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly.*" One of the primary ways we experience this fullness of life that Jesus came to bring is through the sacraments of the Church.

This past week I read an article from *America* magazine that really made me think. Many of you have said how much you miss not being able to attend Mass and receive Communion. This was especially true during Holy Week and on Easter Sunday. Many have also expressed their unhappiness about not being able to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Unfortunately, most of us, including me, never think about all those Catholics throughout the world who are only able to attend Mass and receive sacraments rarely. As the article pointed out, "Catholics around the world go months, even years, without access to the Eucharist and other sacraments. But in the United States, we could not go a full month after the suspension of public Masses before some Catholics started pressuring bishops for the reinstatement of communal liturgies."

My brothers and sisters, on this Good Shepherd Sunday and World Day of Prayer for Vocations, even during this temporary suspension of Masses, we should be grateful that we are able to celebrate sacraments every Sunday. However, we should pray for more vocations to priesthood and religious life so that we will be able to continue to receive the sacraments regularly and the Church will be able to continue to thrive. More importantly, we should also pray for an increase of vocations to those areas of the world not as blessed with priests as we are. As Paul wrote to the Romans, "*But how can they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone to preach?*" [10:14].