

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the Fourth Sunday of Easter. This Sunday is often called Good Shepherd Sunday because the Gospel is always about Jesus the Good Shepherd. Today is also the World Day of Prayer for Vocations.

Jesus had a threefold ministry. He was priest, prophet, and king. However, he was not a king in the typical human understanding of ruler. Therefore, we sometimes say he was a shepherd king. In today's Gospel, Jesus compares himself to a shepherd: "*The shepherd calls his own sheep by name and leads them out....he walks ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they recognize his voice.*" A good shepherd is a leader.

However, the remainder of the chapter suggests the love of a good shepherd for his sheep. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep, which is the heart of Peter's message both in Acts and in his First Letter. He knows his sheep, and his sheep know him. When we talk of Jesus as the Good Shepherd, we are talking about his knowledge of and love for his sheep and his leadership of them. The passage ends with his mission: "*I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly.*"

The theme of this World Day of Prayer for Vocations is "Vocation: Grace and Mission." All of us have a vocation from God. God gives us the gifts or grace necessary to live out that vocation whether as a married person, a single person, a religious, or a priest. However, whatever vocation God gives us is never for ourselves alone. It is to carry on the mission and ministry of Jesus, the mission of the Church. In some sense, we are all called to be teachers of the faith by word and example, we are all called to be healers, reconcilers, and bridge builders, and we are all called to be leaders, again by word and example, whatever our vocation may be.

My class at Little Flower received three sacraments in three days. We made our first confession on Friday and received First Communion and Confirmation on Sunday. We were in first grade and, therefore, six or seven years old. At Confirmation, Archbishop Schulte asked how many of the boys wanted to become priests. Almost every hand went up. He then asked how many of the girls wanted to become sisters. Again, almost every hand went up. In those days, Catholic boys and girls thought about becoming priests or sisters. Not so much today.

On April 20, several parish leaders and I attended a Eucharistic evening at St. Michael Church in Greenfield which included a reflection by Fr. Aaron Jenkins, the pastor. Some of you may know that Fr. Aaron is a convert to Catholicism. The point of his reflection was that it was the Eucharist that drew him to Catholicism as a young adult, and it was the Eucharist that drew him to the priesthood.

In many ways, my story is the same as his, and in many other ways, it is very different from his. As you know, I grew up Catholic here in Little Flower Parish. Many of you know that I was first drawn to the priesthood in the first grade. Like Fr. Aaron, what drew me to the priesthood was the Eucharist.

My brothers and sisters, studies show that most young men who become priests become priests because someone suggested that they would make good priests. Therefore, I want to challenge all of you to invite a young man who you think would be a good priest to consider priesthood. I also want to challenge all of you to invite a young woman who you think would be a good sister to consider religious life. I want to challenge all our boys and girls, all our single young men and women, not to worry so much about what you want to do with your life and to start asking God what he wants you to do with your life.