

4th Sunday of Easter - B
Acts 4:8-12;
I John 3:1-2;
John 10:11-18
Little Flower - 4/21/24

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today is the Fourth Sunday of Easter, often called Good Shepherd Sunday. Today has also been designated the World Day of Prayer for Vocations or Vocation Sunday.

The image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd was the primary image of Jesus in the early Church. Jesus as the Good Shepherd is a very pastoral image, which is understandable. The Latin word for shepherd is *pastor*. Today's Gospel offers us two important insights into the kind of community we are called to be.

In today's Gospel, Jesus said, "*I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me.*" These words of Jesus suggest that he has an intimate relationship with his people. Jesus knows us by name; he knows us as the unique individuals we are. However, he also said, "*I will lay down my life for the sheep,*" which implies that he not only knows us as individuals but also loves us as individuals. Therefore, as a community, we are to be a community of intimacy, a community of believers who know and care for each other.

Concerning the sheep who do not belong to his fold, Jesus said, "*These also I must lead, and they will hear my voice.*" As the Good Shepherd, Jesus had a vision and a mission. This suggests that the Church must be a community with a shared vision and a shared mission. Therefore, as a parish and as individuals, we must share in Jesus' three-fold ministry as Prophet, Priest, and Shepherd-King. We are called to proclaim and live the Gospel. We are called to heal, reconcile, and sanctify. Finally, we are called to lead by witnessing to the world all that the world is called to be.

Today's second reading speaks to us about our eternal destiny. We are children of God now. According to St. John, when God is revealed, "*we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is.*"

Today's first reading is part of a longer story that began with Peter and John curing a lame man. Peter told the lame man, "*I have neither silver nor gold, but I will give you what I have: in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, walk!*" [Acts 3:6]. They cured him in the name of Jesus. When I was a student at St. Meinrad, I was close friends with a monk who was also a music composer. I asked him to compose a song for my First Mass at Little Flower. The refrain of that song is "*Whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus...*" from St. Paul's Letter to the Colossians [3:17]. We cannot follow Christ more closely than by striving to imitate Christ in everything we do and doing everything in the name of the Lord Jesus.

My brothers and sisters, on Good Shepherd Sunday, priests are encouraged to share their vocation story in their homilies. I have shared parts of my story at different times. A few weeks ago, during our 40 Hours of Eucharistic Adoration, several people were invited to share what the Eucharist has meant in their lives. I was asked but initially declined. However, at the last moment, I was struck with a thought I wanted to share. Since very few people were there, I thought today would be a good day to share it again in the midst of the Eucharistic Revival and with the Eucharistic Congress approaching.

When people ask when I first wanted to become a priest, I have always answered that I wanted to become a priest since I was in first grade. What drew me to the priesthood was the Mass. Very simply, as a first grader, I was fascinated by the Mass. I fell in love with the Latin Mass. I could feel the mystery. First Communion meant so much to me that I still remember the date—May 6, 1956. On June 29th, I will have been a priest for 49 years. I am still passionate about the Mass, and the Mass is still the center of my faith and spirituality. The Mass still gives meaning to my life.