

My Brothers and Sisters,

The parish staff and I want to wish all mothers and those who take the place of mothers a very happy and blessed Mother's Day.

Today we celebrate the Fourth Sunday of Easter. The Fourth Sunday of Easter is often called Good Shepherd Sunday because of today's Gospel. Today is also the World Day of Prayer for Vocations. With the election of Pope Leo, it seems appropriate that we are celebrating Good Shepherd Sunday and the World Day of Prayer for Vocations.

All of us have seen pictures of the Good Shepherd with a lamb around his shoulders. The various Gospel passages about the Good Shepherd suggest an intimate relationship between the Good Shepherd and his sheep. Because Jesus is the Good Shepherd, he knows his sheep, and his sheep know him. Because they know him, they follow him. The Good Shepherd strives to bring all the sheep into one flock. Also, because he loves them, he protects them and sacrifices his life for them. The Good Shepherd not only gives his life for his sheep; he also gives life to his sheep. As Jesus said, "*I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly*" [Jn. 10:10b].

One reason why today is the World Day of Prayer for Vocations is because the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd reminds us that the Church needs continuing servant leadership. The Church needs priests. Since the Second Vatican Council, lay men and women have taken on more and more responsibilities within the Church, which is a very good thing. When people take on responsibilities for their community, they have a greater sense of ownership and a higher commitment to the mission of the community. However, no matter how much responsibility lay people assume, because we are a sacramental Church, the Church will still need priests. Already in many parts of the world, Catholics rarely see a priest and, therefore, rarely receive sacraments. It is because of the extreme shortage of priests that Little Flower is being asked to share a priest with Our Lady of Lourdes.

Today we are also called to pray for an increase of vocations to religious life, i.e., sisters, brothers, and religious order priests. They too play a critical role in the Church. If the Church is called to witness to the world all that the world is called to be, religious priests, brothers, and sisters are called to witness to the Church all that the Church is called to be.

Today, then, I would invite you to pray for vocations to priesthood and religious life. I would also invite you, especially parents, especially mothers, to invite young men and boys to think about priesthood. Likewise, please invite young men and women to consider religious life. So many young priests and religious say that it was someone's personal invitation that caused them to think about priesthood or religious life. Mothers have a strong influence on the faith of their children. Therefore, the invitation of a parent, especially a mother, to consider a vocation to priesthood or religious life can have a major impact on a child's vocation.

My brothers and sisters, although today we are invited to pray for vocations to priesthood and religious life, all of us are called to be servant leaders. This is especially true of parents. Parents, especially mothers, embody the Gospel ideal of the Good Shepherd in their love and care for their children. Friday was the 38th anniversary of my mother's death. My brother and I always knew that our mother put our needs and the needs of our family ahead of her own. In his book *Lead Like Jesus*, Ken Blanchard argues that leadership is about influencing others. His first example of leadership is "A mother with a child at any time of day." Mothers have tremendous influence on every aspect of their children's lives. Although none of our mothers were perfect, neither were we. Today is a day to be grateful to our mothers for helping us grow into the persons we are today, beginning with being grateful to them for their very first gift to us, the gift of life.