

## **Fourth Sunday of Easter A - The Good Shepherd Calls All to Holiness as Part of His Flock** May 3, 2020.

The Fourth Sunday of Easter is traditionally called the **Sunday of the Good Shepherd**, and also the **World Day of Prayer for Vocations**. Our Lord, the shepherd wants to lead us to green pastures if we respond to his call. Jesus identifies himself not just **the Good Shepherd**, but also **the Gatekeeper**, and even **the Gate to the sheep-fold**. In the second part of this Sunday's Gospel (John 10:1-10) Jesus adds that not only is He the Good Shepherd, He is the **Sheep-gate**. He is our protection against thieves and marauders who would steal and destroy our souls. The New Testament proclaims that all who stay united to Christ will live forever. No matter what people attempt to do to us or how they attack us, they cannot destroy that Life that He has given us, the Life we celebrate particularly at Easter-time. Nothing can destroy His Life. The Sheep Gate protects us from eternal death.

We learn from this Sunday's readings, how God uses the apostles to evangelize and to help bring lost sheep back to His sheep-fold. In the first reading, (Acts 2, 14A, 36-41): **Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized, ... in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is made to you and to your children and to all those far off,.... Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand persons were added that day."** Early believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and many were added to the Church.

We surely are fortunate to belong to the **sheepfold of Christ—His Church** and are surely blessed to have the Son of God as our Shepherd, who opens the gate, comes among us in order to lead us to heaven. But the church is always haunted by the notion that perhaps we can be of God but not of the church. Long before there was a church, Jesus makes it clear that not all of God's children, or God's sheep, are of one flock. This is a misfortune that could happen to any one of us, unless we think often of our purpose and our end in life. We know that if we follow the shepherd of our souls, we are on the way to the true life, the perfect life, the unending life which will have no sorrow, regret or pain. Where Christ is, there is perfect happiness. Do we fully appreciate our privileged position being in Christ's sheep-fold? Do we always live up to our heavenly vocation? We know His voice but do we always listen? We know what He asks of us but do we always do what He asks?

There are many among us today who foolishly think we need no shepherd, no sheep-fold. We think we know all the facts of life while we are in total ignorance of the very purpose of life. Though the thought of it does arise disturbingly in our minds time and time again, we try to smother that thought and ease our consciences by immersing ourselves deeper and deeper in the affairs and the passing pleasures of this temporary life. Alas for us, what will our fate be when we meet Christ the Judge, when we face the gatekeeper whom we had ignored and refused to follow during our days on earth? Despite all our shortcomings, we can be the touch of human love for those who have no friends, the tower of strength for those who are helpless and the healer in times of hurt. God sent Jesus to instruct his apostles, his disciples and us to proclaim the Good News and to call the stray sheep to repent, be baptized and be in Christ's sheep-fold.

Pope Francis' prayer intention for evangelization in May is focused on Deacons: **We pray that deacons, faithful in their service to the Word and the poor, may be an invigorating symbol for the entire Church.** Ever since I was ordained Permanent Deacon, I always imagine we Deacons are like faithful sheep dogs helping the Good Shepherd to evangelize, looking for sheep not listening to God's call, searching for lost sheep that have drifted away, guiding them back to Christ's sheep-fold, the Church. We definitely need your prayers that we may be an invigorating symbol, as Pope Francis says, not just for our parish, our diocese but for the entire Church. This Sunday's Gospel forces us to ask ourselves,

**“Whose voice is it that I am following?** Is it the voice of the immoral elements of our society? Is it the voice of the popular but self-absorbed? Or do I follow the voice of the Lord?”

As mentioned in the beginning, this Sunday is also the **World Sunday of Prayer for Vocations**. Everyone is called to holiness, and Our Lord has put people in our lives who want to help us live up to that calling and fulfill it. He also teaches us to pray for workers to be sent to an abundant harvest - gathering lost sheep. There is more work than there are workers. When we pray “for vocations” we pray especially for those discerning a vocation to the priesthood or the consecrated life. We also pray for the perseverance and holiness of those who are already in priesthood or consecrated life. The need for prayers doesn’t end at ordination or solemn consecration. Let’s pray for those who have responded to Our Lord’s call to work in his harvest. Lastly, **let’s pray for everyone to simply seek and do the will of God in their lives. We all have a vocation to holiness, and holiness grows to the degree that we follow God’s will. The caring acts of God are performed in hands that serve. Christ is dependent on us to be shepherds of his flock in a caring and loving service of others. There is no other way for the church to be a beacon of hope, a light in the darkness and a sign of salvation for those in need of help.**

People in Fort McMurray surely have a vocation to Holiness, to work the will of God. We, **Fort McMurray Strong** faced the wildfire 4 years ago with the whole city evacuated. Many businesses are just starting to build back. Then the Coronavirus pandemic. And now ice-jam (25 km long on Athabasca River) flooding. Our Mayor Don Scott said ***this is the worst flood this region has experienced in 100 years.*** Environment Minister Jason Nixon said: ***“wait for Mother Nature to do its job. .. warm weather to soften the ice.”*** The whole downtown was under mandatory evacuation, more than 12,000 people. Many not affected were volunteering to set up camps for the evacuees, bringing food and building sandbag wall around the Hospital. The office basement of our St John the Baptist Parish in downtown is almost completely flooded. The church basement also got flooded. Let’s pray for those affected by floods: ***Compassionate God, source of all comfort, We pray for the people whose lives have been devastated by the flood. Bring them comfort, we pray. Protect the vulnerable. Strengthen the weak. Keep at bay the spread of disease. Have mercy on all those working to rescue the stranded, house the evacuated and to feed the hungry. And may our response to their suffering be generous and bring you praise. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.***