

4th Sunday of Easter (A)
(Acts 2:14.36-41 / John 10:1-10)
11.05.2014

Vocations Sunday

Dear brothers and sisters,

Easter is one day which in fact lasts fifty days. So, on this fourth Sunday of Easter, we continue to welcome the presence of the Risen Lord in our midst. To contemplate his presence, the liturgy proposes that we look at the image of the Good Shepherd. The Risen Christ is the Good Shepherd. We are his sheep.

Anyone who has ever taken the time to look into a field where sheep are grazing in presence of their shepherd will have recognized that there is an obvious connivance, a complicity between the shepherd and the sheep. The shepherd cares for his sheep. He knows his sheep and his sheep know him. He protects the sheep from their enemies: wolves, thieves or brigands. The sheep know this and they know the shepherd's voice, when he comes to call them.

The image of the Good Shepherd with his sheep is perfectly relevant for describing the relationship between the Risen Lord and each one of us. The Risen Lord cares for us and calls each one of us by our name.

Today is 'Vocations Sunday'. Our vocation is the personal call that we have received from the Lord. Every Christian has a vocation. For many of us, it may be marriage and raising a family. For others, it may be living in the world as a single man or woman. For some of us it may involve a vocation to the priesthood or religious life. This idea of a vocation to priesthood or religious life frightens many people today. There are so many other vocations or careers we can choose that seem more exciting, and that pay better. Living a life of celibacy can seem off-putting, even a little crazy. Placing yourself under obedience to a bishop or a religious superior can seem like giving up your freedom. But 'Vocations Sunday' is an invitation for us not to dismiss the idea of a religious vocation out of hand. It also invites each one of us to think about our fundamental vocation as Christians, which is to witness to the gospel no matter what our state in life.

To come back to our gospel passage, in biblical times, the shepherd was with his sheep night and day. What is distilled from this strong metaphor is **the importance of caring**. We need to care for others and to be cared for by others.

Those whom the Lord has called to priesthood or to religious life have for mission to care for their brothers and sisters in humanity. They care for them by reminding them of the true values in life, and, to begin with, the full picture of their own lives: from whence they come and to where they go. They remind us that we are loved, saved, forgiven and set free by the Lord. They remind us that what is important is not to have more and more, to hoard up riches for ourselves, but to share with those in need. They remind us that work is not an absolute: the be-all and end-all of life. Precisely, Sabbath is, or at least should be, part of our life time; it is what gives time and work its meaning and its right measure. What is important is not what we are doing, but who we are: that is to say sheep that listen to and follow Christ the Good Shepherd. Those who consecrate

their lives entirely to the Lord's service remind us that we are called not to dominate but to serve, that others are more important than ourselves, even if it is true that we have also to respect and take care of ourselves. They remind us that we should give Christ the first place in our lives and allow him to regulate all our relationships: our relationship with ourselves first and foremost, and then our relationship with all other human beings, and, stemming from this, our relationship with what we possess, even with our addictions and with our ideologies. Consecrated men and women should be icons of God's compassion for his people and unwearied messengers of Holy Hope for all who are experiencing trials in life.

We really need people who care for us and who help us to care for ourselves; we really need people who remind us the presence of the Risen Lord by our side. This is one of the main roles and purposes of those who live a vocation to priesthood or religious life. It is a fulfilling and uplifting vocation. It is really an exciting vocation! Celibacy and obedience which could frighten us are a means to help us to give the first place to Christ and to care for others untiringly on his behalf.

The Risen Lord is the Good Shepherd who cares for us. Let us give thanks for all those who care for us on his behalf. Let us ask him, with an instant prayer, to send forth labourers to his harvest! As the Lord cares for us, so may we care for one another!