**Sermon**

The Fourth Sunday of Easter is knows as Good Shepherd Sunday or World Day of Prayer for Vocations. Each year on this Sunday we reflect on the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd who devotedly and kindly takes care of his flock. The title “pastor” means shepherd. A shepherd leads, feeds, nurtures, comforts, corrects, and protects his flock.

In today’s first reading Paul and Barnabas opted to listen to the voice of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, and follow him. Like their Master, they were rebuffed and rejected when they tried to share the good news of salvation. This suggest that the sympathy of the early Christians for the Gentiles caused a rupture with Judaism. The second reading from the book of Revelations depicts Jesus as both the glorified Lamb and the Shepherd. John’s vision encourages his readers with the assurance that every person who has ever followed Christ and led others to him will share everlasting life with him.

The Gospel text offers us both comfort and great challenge. The comforting message is that no one can snatch the sheep out of the Father’s hands. The challenge is that pastors should be good *shepherds* to those entrusted to their care, while their flocks of lay people should respond by being good sheep.

In the Old Testament, the image of the Shepherd is often applied to God as well as to the leaders of the people. The book of Exodus represents Yahweh several times as the Shepherd. Isaiah and Ezekiel compare Yahweh’s care and protection of His people to that of a shepherd. Ezekiel represents God as a loving Shepherd who searches diligently for the lost sheep. In the New Testament: introducing himself as the Good Shepherd of his flock, Jesus make three claims in today’s Gospel. (1) He knows his sheep and they hear his voice. (2) He give eternal life to us, his sheep, by giving us faith in him through Baptism and the strengthening that Faith through Confirmation, by nourishing our souls with the Holy Eucharist and Holy Bible, and by making our society holy through the Sacraments of Matrimony and the priesthood. (3) He protects his sheep by placing them in the loving hands of his Almighty Father.

St John’s Gospel adds two more claims: (4) He goes in search of stray lambs and heals the sick ones. (5) Jesus died for his sheep to free us from our sins, giving us life. Let us become good shepherds. Everyone who is entrusted with the care of others is a shepherd. Thus pastors, parents, teachers, doctors, nurses, government officials, etc. are all shepherds. We become good shepherds by loving those entrusted to us, praying for them, spending our time and talents for their welfare, and guarding them from physical and spiritual dangers.

*Let us become good shepherds and good sheep, good leaders and good followers.* Let us become good shepherds: Everyone who is entrusted with the care of others is a shepherd. Thus pastors, parents, teachers, doctors, nurses, government officials etc. are all shepherds. We become good shepherds by loving those entrusted to us, praying for them spending our time and talents for their welfare, and guarding them from physical and spiritual dangers. As the good sheep of the fold of Jesus, the Good Shepherd our Parish is our sheepfold and our pastors our shepherds. Let us pray for vocations to priestly and religious life so that we may have good shepherds to lead, feed, and protect our community.

Today we than our mothers, pray for them and honour them by celebrating Mother’s Day and by offering our mothers on the altar of God and by praying for them. This is a day to admit gratefully the fact that none of us can return, in the same measure, all the love that our mothers’ have given us. Our mothers are the good shepherds we all experienced. They gave us life, nursed us, fed us, taught us, disciplined us, showed Christ’s self-sacrificing agape love for us, their children, practicing Christ’s commandment of love. Let us remember that we have two mothers. Hence, let us entrust our mothers to our Heavenly Mother, Mary, the mother of Jesus who gave her as our mother, as a last gift to us from the cross before his death.

Today I finish off Good Shepherd’s Day with a bit of humour.

The young pastor was teaching the 23rd Psalm to the Sunday school children. He told them that they were sheep who needed guidance. Then the Priest asked, “If you are the sheep, then who is the shepherd?” – obviously indicating himself. A silence of a few seconds followed. Then a young boy said, “Jesus. Jesus is the Shepherd.” The young priest, obviously caught by surprise, said to the boy, “Well then, who am I?” The boy frowned thoughtfully and then said, “I guess you must be the sheep dog.”