

4th Sunday of Easter (C)
(Acts 13:14.43-52 / John 10:27-30)
17.04.2016
Good Shepherd Sunday
World Day of Prayer for Vocations

Dear brothers and sisters,

The liturgy of the fourth Sunday of Easter invites us to celebrate the Risen Lord as the Good Shepherd. The Risen Lord is the Good Shepherd, we are his sheep. We belong to Him. He knows us. He gives us eternal life. With Him, we shall never be lost. No one can steal us from Him.

In our relationship with the Lord, what comes first is not our prayer, our efforts, our good works, our acts of repentance and conversion, but the Lord's love for us, his mercy, his compassion. In other words, in our relationship with the Lord, **it is the Lord who has the initiative**: He created each one of us out of love. He loves each one of us with a unique love. In our relationship with the Lord, we have first and above all to receive his love which is a free gift. We cannot and should not try to buy the Lord's love by our own efforts, but rather open our hearts to receive it as a grace. The Good News is that in God's eyes we are lovable and loved. God does not love our sins, but he loves the persons we are and he loves us unconditionally.

At this point, a question imposes itself to us: Deep down within our hearts, do we really believe that we are lovable and indeed loved by the Lord? If this is something we find difficult to believe, then we have to ask the Lord in prayer to reveal to us that He truly loves us, that we have a great price to his eyes. This is the good news we need to believe and even experience before going any further. The Risen Lord is in love with us.

It is because we believe that we are loved unconditionally that we feel the necessity to be reconciled with and forgiven by God in the sacrament of reconciliation which is the celebration of God's love for us before being the confession of our sins. God's initiative in his relationship with his people, with each one of us runs throughout the whole Bible. In the Decalogue, for example, what is first is not: 'Do this and that; don't do this or that', but I, the Lord, have set you free from bondage in Egypt. If you want to remain free, and this is my desire for you, you should do this and that, and not do this or that. In our relationship with the Lord, what is first is God's love for us; our response to his love follows on from this.

We belong to the Lord who first loved us. In answer to his love, we are invited **to listen to Him**, as the sheep listen to the shepherd and follow Him. To listen to the Lord is our way of loving Him in return for his love for us.

The Risen Lord, our Good Shepherd, speaks to us in many ways and under many guises. He speaks to us through the Word of God that we have to read and meditate upon day after day, keeping it in our heart and putting it into practice.

He speaks to us through the Magisterium of the Church: the bishops and their collaborators, the Pope's teaching and example, the Prior of our monastic community, or the superiors of religious communities.

The Risen Lord, our Good Shepherd, speaks to us through one another, because we were all created in the image and likeness of God, and so there is something from God in each one of us. He speaks to a husband through his wife and vice versa. He speaks to children through their

parents and vice versa. He speaks to us through co-workers, friends and neighbours. The Lord speaks to us through one another. The Risen Lord is a multifaceted Good Shepherd who cares for us through many mediations.

To listen to the Lord is not easy. It requires of us humility of heart: the humility to listen to a point of view which is different to our own. We know that the Lord is always the Lord of surprises! If, in the light of the Holy Spirit, we discern that it is the Lord who speaks to us through one of these mediations that we have just enumerated, then we have to renounce our own way of thinking and follow what we believe to be the Lord's way. Yes, to truly listen to the Lord is not easy; in some circumstances, it can even be crucifying; but it is the way to life; it is the way for us to give answer to the Lord's love for us by our love for Him.

Today is the **World Day of Prayer for vocations**, vocations not only to priesthood, and monastic or religious life, but also vocations in life. We all have a vocation in God's eyes. We all have to pray in order to discern what our vocation in life is. If we consider now vocations to priesthood and monastic or religious life, how true that verse of the gospel is here in Ireland – in this monastery – and right across the European Church: “The harvest is rich, but the labourers are few”. The labourers are few, but I believe that the Lord continues to call women and men to serve Him in the Church today.

How can we know that God is calling us to serve Him? God's call to us is the deepest and recurring desire in our hearts, a desire placed by God himself within our hearts.

A real temptation for us is to hear God's call and think that it is not for us, because we are sinners and unworthy. We can exclude ourselves, when the Lord wants to include us. The truth is that God calls sinners and poor people to serve Him. God works in and through our weaknesses. God's call is an amazing grace and not something we should merit by already leading a perfect life. God's call is a merciful and graceful invitation. Our answer to God's call every day of our lives will also be God's grace offered to us step by step. One thing is sure: To answer God's call to priesthood, or to monastic or religious life, is a source of great and deep joy. It is not without its challenges and difficulties, but there is deep down real joy in it.

Let us pray to the Lord who loves us to send labourers to his harvest. Let us pray for those He calls so that they have the faith and the courage to answer. There may be some who hear this call today. May they dare to believe in God and in the confidence God has in them. Amen.