

Good Shepherd Sunday & World Day of Prayer for Vocations - St. Clement

Introduction

I am delighted to be with all of you this morning at Saint Clement for my first visit to this parish community. I am grateful to Deacon Paul Gifford for his warm welcome and gracious hospitality. I am also grateful that the English-speaking and Spanish-speaking communities have come together to celebrate the Eucharist and worship as one - one in faith and one in love of God.

Queridos hermanos y hermanas, estoy muy contento de estar con ustedes hoy para celebrar la Misa de cuarto domingo de Pascua. Demos gracias al Señor por su gran amor y misericordia, y por ser nuestro a Buen Pastor. Pidamos su ayuda para que podamos reconocer su voz y escuchar su llamado para ser sus discípulos y testigos fieles del Evangelio.

And I'm especially happy to visit you on this Fourth Sunday of Easter, known as Good Shepherd Sunday - for on this Sunday the Gospel is always about Jesus, the Good Shepherd. For over fifty years, the Church has also celebrated this Sunday as the World Day of Prayer for Vocations. And this is to remind us how earnestly we need to pray for vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life especially from our own community, our own parish, and yes, dare I say, our own families... we all have a role to play in fostering priestly vocations. How important that there always be good holy priests and pastors who will lead us to Christ and share with us his love, a love that not only consoles and strengthens us, but indeed a love that changes us, transforms us, into his disciples and witnesses.

Transformation

Indeed, today's readings are all about Christ's transforming love. In the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles St. Peter stands before the leaders of the Jewish people defending his actions of healing a disabled man through the power of Jesus. In this passage, two unlikely people are transformed: the crippled man is a lowly person who is miraculously healed; Peter is an uneducated, ordinary man, emboldened to preach the Gospel. These two men are transformed through Jesus. Here we see how God can transform anyone He chooses ... as the saying goes ... 'God does not always call the equipped but He equips those whom He calls.

In the Gospel, Jesus calls Himself the Good Shepherd who knows His sheep. He lays down His life for them and is raised up again. All of us are called to entrust our lives to the Good Shepherd - to entrust to him our cares and worries, to allow him to lead us back when we stray, and to teach us how to serve and care for one another, as He cares for us. And while all are called to holiness and service in the life of the Church, some are called to serve the Church as priests, to be living, sacramental images of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who devote the whole of their lives to the service of God's People. Pope Francis' famously said that priests are supposed to "smell like the sheep," that is, to be with their people, to closely identify with them in the trials of life, to accompany them every step of the way on their journey of faith. Those called to be shepherds must themselves learn to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd and be transformed into loving, fearless, and faithful servants, who in turn call the faithful to repentance and a life of holiness and service to others.

Exodus

So, if we are transformed by Christ to serve Him and His Church, it necessarily means that we have to turn away from ourselves and begin to live our lives for others. We no longer live for our own desires and needs, but instead we have to make an exodus, an outward journey, moving beyond our own personal wants and needs and preferences and moving outward to listen to others, to walk them in life, discerning with them how best to open their hearts that infinite love for we all long,

the love of God poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

In his message for this Sunday, Pope Francis puts it this way: "The exodus experience [stands as a symbol] of the Christian life, particularly in the case of those who have embraced a vocation of special dedication to the Gospel. This calls for a constantly renewed attitude of conversion and transformation, an incessant moving forward, a passage from death to life, like that celebrated in every liturgy, an experience of Passover." And lest we think we can achieve this on our own, the Holy Father goes on to say: "...vocation is always a work of God. He leads us beyond our initial situation, frees us from every enslavement, breaks down our habits and our indifference, and brings us to the joy of communion with Him and with our brothers and sisters. Responding to God's call, [he says] means allowing Him to help us leave ourselves and our false security behind, and to strike out on the path which leads to Jesus Christ, the origin and destiny of our life and our happiness."

Of course, this is not easy, but after serving the Church as a priest for 38 years, I can say from my own experience, in need of God's mercy as I am, that nothing brings more happiness than giving ourselves in service to the Lord. I look around here today in this church and I see numerous young people. I am certain that the Lord is calling some of you to serve Him as a priest or as a brother or sister in the consecrated life. I ask you today to listen for God's call and to pray to have the courage to say 'yes' to Him. Indeed, answering God's call is exciting, but as with every other decision we make, it involves saying 'no' to other possibilities.

Y a todos ustedes jóvenes hispano-hablantes , les pido de manera especial que estén abiertos a los llamados de Dios en sus vidas. El número de Latinos que vienen a vivir en esta Arquidiócesis sigue aumentando y por esta razón, hay una mayor necesidad de sacerdotes y religiosos hispano-hablantes quienes puedan responder a las necesidades particulares de esta comunidad que está creciendo. Les pido que oren a Dios para que les ayude a entender Su voluntad en la vida de cada uno de ustedes; Si piensan que están siendo llamados al sacerdocio o a la vida religiosa, hablen con un sacerdote o con una religiosa y oren para tener el valor de responder con un "SI" lleno de alegría. Necesitamos su energía, su fidelidad, y sus talentos para ayudar a que esta Arquidiócesis tenga más vitalidad y sea más fuerte de modo que más personas puedan ser acercadas a Cristo.

To everyone else here today, I ask that you please pray for religious vocations, that many more young men and women will answer God's call. Each of us has a responsibility to promote vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life. Let us also pray for those who are already in seminaries and religious houses of formation at this time, that they will persevere in accepting God's call. And please pray for bishops, priests, deacons, and those in consecrated life, that God will strengthen them in their vocations in order to lead us in the ways of truth and love.

Conclusion

Finally, pray that all of us may have the courage to follow the will of God and go out into the world radiating the love and compassion of God. If we do not venture out of the safety of our comfort zone, who will preach to a world that continues to be largely disinterested in the Gospel of Jesus Christ? How will God's word be known unless we first hear it, heed it, speak it, and finally live it in the open?

Thus each of us, in accordance with our God-given vocation, is called to participate in the mission of Jesus the Good Shepherd. It is my prayer that God will raise up many holy shepherds from this parish and make all of you into His true disciples and friends as you seek to live the Gospel and transmit it to others. In all of this we have no need to fear because Jesus, our Good Shepherd, will not leave us, his flock, untended.

May God bless you and keep you always in His love.