

# Monday 4th Week of Easter

Yesterday and today, the Gospel presents to us the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. He knows us, loves us, and walks with us throughout our journey through life. He is with us in good times and bad, in times of joy, hope, and accomplishment but the Good Shepherd is also with us in times of sorrow, tragedy, confusion, and violence.

We are in such a moment now in the City of Baltimore as we struggle to deal with the violent death of Freddie Gray and its aftermath in our community. This morning we entrust Freddie and his family to the Good Shepherd. He is not merely a symbol but a real person who tragically lost his life. We pray that he may know the peace of God's Kingdom and that his family may be consoled.

This is also a moment when we ask the Good Shepherd to guide our civic leaders, that their investigations of this matter will be swift, thorough, open, and honest, and that it will help our community to find ways to address systemic issues, including the relationship of the police force to the wider community and the issues of poverty, drugs, and violence that continue to beset so many among us. We pray also that when today's funeral is over and in days to come, protesters will voice their views freely and openly but without violence which only deepens and prolongs the injustice of this whole situation. Good Shepherd, hear us!

Reflecting on the issues confronting our community, I thought of two initiatives underway in the Church that pertain to us as religious but also pertain to how we relate to others, to those all around us.

The first is this year dedicated to consecrated life, called by Pope Francis, with its theme, "Wake Up the World!" Like you, I have two kinds of clocks - regular clocks that silently mark the passage of minutes and hours each day; and an alarm clock that every morning wakes me up with a jolt. (Perhaps I should consult a cardiologist!) Pope Francis wants us to be alarm clocks - men and women religious who do not merely mark the time but whose lives and whose witness awaken in others the realization that now is the acceptable time, now is the day of salvation - Christ the good shepherd is here, he is speaking to our hearts, He is calling us to

live the Beatitudes! So by your way of life and by your witness, you wake a world so prone to indifference to those in need, to divisions that lead to bitterness and even violence, to self-centered and self-destructive ways of life... You are for all of us in the Church and for the wider society a wake-up call!

The second is the Year of Mercy which Pope Francis just announced, a special holy year of grace, scheduled to begin December 8th. We always experience God's love as mercy, for the Lord's love always includes forgiveness of our sins, strength for our weakness, and his initiative in drawing near to us even when we stray. God pours out mercy upon us not so that we can stay the same, not to pander to our sins and worst instincts, but rather so that we can be converted and live that newness of life which the Risen Lord has won for us by the Paschal Mystery. In receiving mercy, we must also ourselves become merciful, indeed, ministers of mercy. Your consecrated lives are like the Beatitudes in concentrated form... they capture and express the very heart of the Gospel of mercy ... Blessed are the merciful! And mercy - both the mercy we receive from God and the mercy we show toward others - is crucial in building trust, in building relationships, in overcoming differences, and in building a society that is just, peaceful, and loving.

So as we thank God for the year dedicated to consecrated life and look ahead to the special holy year of mercy, let us ask for the grace to be builders of relationships in the Church and in the wider community where we live and minister. May God bless us and keep us always in His love.