

11 May 2025 – 4th Sunday of Easter, Year C

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Day of prayer for Vocations. We celebrate Christ our Good Shepherd. Hearing his voice in the proclamation of the gospel, we follow him by living the gospel.

1st Reading: Acts 13:14, 43-52

Paul and Barnabas preach first to the Jews, then to the pagans

They went on from Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia. And on the sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down.... When the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who spoke to them and urged them to continue in the grace of God.

The next sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy; and blaspheming, they contradicted what was spoken by Paul. Then both Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you reject it and judge yourselves to be unworthy of eternal life, we are now turning to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, 'I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, so that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'"

When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and praised the word of

the Lord; and as many as had been destined for eternal life became believers. Thus the word of the Lord spread throughout the region. But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, and stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their region. So they shook the dust off their feet in protest against them, and went to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

Responsorial: Psalm 99: 1-3, 5

R./: We are his people, the sheep of his flock

Cry out with joy to the Lord, all the earth.

Serve the Lord with gladness.

Come before him, singing for joy. (R./)

Know that he, the Lord, is God.

He made us, we belong to him,

we are his people, the sheep of his flock. (R./)

Indeed, how good is the Lord,

eternal his merciful love.

He is faithful from age to age. (R./)

2nd Reading: Revelation 7:9, 14-17

In praise of the martyrs, who came through persecution into glory

After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages,

standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, “Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!” And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, singing, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”

Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, “Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?” I said to him, “Sir, you are the one that knows.” Then he said to me, “These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

Gospel: John 10:27-30

Christ is the true Shepherd, who knows each one personally

And Jesus said to his disciples: “My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father’s hand. The Father and I are one.”

Who will answer the call?

Paul and Barnabas were urgent in preaching the gospel, according to Luke's narrative in the Acts of the Apostles. They disregarded every attempt by their critics to stop them. Threats were ignored, and they seemed driven by an inner God-given sense of mission to promote faith in Jesus. This links well with the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd, who invites people to follow him to eternal life. The church today invites us to pray for vocations to the priesthood and the consecrated life, since such vocations play an active part in handing on the faith. All Christians believe that God is love and goodness. But love and goodness need to be communicated to others, "in season and out of season."

The Holy Spirit inspired evangelical zeal in the early Church, making them eager to share their faith with others. When the first missionaries passed from the scene, there was no scarcity of others to take their place. It was this willingness to take an active part that kept the church alive and spreading. We admire the missionary zeal of the early Church, and that of the Irish people during that era when missionaries from these shores spread abroad the ideals of loving God and living together in harmony and peace. But the question is, who will answer that kind of calling, today?

Most vocations to a life of service are first nurtured within the family. The French Jesuit, scientist and philosopher, Teilhard de Chardin, once said, "It was in my family that I became who I am. Most of my opinions, of my likes and dislikes, of my values and judgments, my behaviour, my tastes, were moulded by the family I came from." Parents remain the first and most important teachers of the faith, and of ideals. In fulfilling this role they should try to make daily prayer a natural part of life within the home. By so doing, they may sow the

seeds of those vocations which will serve the spiritual needs of the next generation.

Church leaders need to think soberly about the structures that can help foster genuine vocations to ministry in the future. It may well be that celibacy needs to be made optional for priesthood, so that all local communities can be provided with Mass and the sacraments. Vocation to ministry must be seen in the context of viable spirituality here and now, the spiritual values and aspirations of the community which is to be served.

Just as Christ called some to be his evangelists, so he calls you and me into his service. What I do, how I live as his follower, concerns others too. On this special Sunday, we ask God's blessing, that volunteers will feel drawn to continue Christ's work. His wish for his disciples was quite explicit, "Pray to the Lord of the harvest, to send labourers to his harvest" (Mt 9:37).

Real pastors care for real people

Jesus was often drawn to use the imagery of shepherds and sheep. Today's gospel considers the relationship between Jesus the Good Shepherd and the sheep he cares for and protects. The imagery is old but the message is topical. It is relevant to us and to the vibrancy and viability of our church. Our relationship with Jesus is a deeply personal one, but it is a force in our life that we are invited to share with others.

In order to gain eternal life, we need to listen to Jesus our Shepherd,

and follow him. We attune our minds to the sound of his voice and let him lead us in the path he has shown. Self-centredness can make deafen to the voice of Jesus. The easy option is to wander into rosier paths than the one he has traced. Many siren voices can draw us into an existence of corporate materialism and selfish comfort. But God is faithful and will not let us be tempted beyond our strength. We are in good hands, since God has entrusted us to his Son, our shepherd and saviour.

Paul and Barnabas ‘spoke out boldly’, and their conviction made an impact. A courageous speaking about our inmost beliefs can be as fruitful now as it was in apostolic times. Every one who has been baptized and confirmed, is entrusted with spreading the faith. Laity as well as priests and religious are in the service of the Risen Lord.

Recent popes have urged us to take personal part in the work of evangelisation. Are we doing so? How many harmful situations flourish in our society just because good people say nothing and do nothing about them? The words of an Easter hymn spells out what is expected of us by the Risen Lord:

“Now he bids us tell abroad
How the lost may be restored
How the penitent forgiven
How we too may enter heaven.”

“Good Shepherd Sunday” is a time to wonder how priestly ministry the catholic church will fare into the future. If the average age of priests in Ireland is about seventy, it calls for significant change in how to recruit priests for the future, and what to require of them. There should be no such thing as a *priest-less parish*. There may not be an ordained priest there right now, but the parish is a priestly people. Are

there factors which had value in the past which now are an obstacle to the mission of the church? What new model of ministerial priesthood is called for?

Here are three questions worth examining today:

- 1) Who will shepherd our church in the coming years?
 - 2) How will those shepherds reach out to those outside the fold?
 - 3) What needs to change, so that the faithful can have Mass every Sunday?
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