

Good Shepherd Sunday
World Day of Prayer for Vocations

Today, on this Fourth Sunday of Easter, the Church focuses our attention on Jesus, the Good Shepherd. The image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd is one of the most familiar and beloved images of the New Testament. Jesus is the Good Shepherd because he lays down his life for his sheep; Jesus is the Good Shepherd because he knows each of his sheep by name. And those who belong to his flock hear his voice and follow him.

On this Good Shepherd Sunday the Church summons us to pray that the Good Shepherd will send others to pastor and watch over his flock. And so today is a day of prayer for vocations: vocations to the priesthood and vocations to religious life. On this day, the Church invites us to pray that the Lord of the Harvest will call young men and women to dedicate their lives to spreading the Gospel as priests and religious.

I have been a priest for forty-seven years and, while there have been moments of trial and doubt as there are in every life, I have never regretted my decision to serve the Church as a priest. Being a priest has enabled me to be intimately involved in the lives of parishioners in extraordinary ways. As a priest I have been privileged to share in the most important moments of people's lives. I have accompanied them in their sorrows and well as in their joys, their failures as well as their successes.

Although being a priest has been an extraordinary grace for which I will be forever grateful, the idea of becoming a priest or entering into religious life rarely occurs to most young people today. And so we find ourselves in a situation in which there are fewer and fewer priests and religious to serve more and more Catholics. But I am not discouraged or despondent. In God's way, in God's time, I believe this situation will be reversed. But in the meantime, we have to do our part.

Do you know a young man who might be a good priest? If so, invite him to consider exploring the possibility of becoming a priest? Do you know a young woman who wants to dedicate herself entirely to God? If so, invite her to consider exploring the possibility of entering religious life. It is not that young people are uninterested in dedicating their lives to God. I have met many who are. But they have never been invited to consider the possibility of doing so. But what if you reached out to them and suggested the possibility? What if you planted the seed that might lead to a vocation to priesthood or religious life?

If you are a young person reading this column, ask yourself what you want to do with the precious gift of life that God has given you. How do you want to live the rest of your life? What is really and truly important to you? Do you have a deep love for Christ and the Church? Do you have a passion to proclaim the good news of the gospel to others? Are you interested in a life of serving others for the sake of the gospel? If so, being a priest or a religious sister may be a way

in which you can fulfill your deepest desires. For when all is said and done, our deepest desire is for God, and it is only when we satisfy this desire that we will be truly fulfilled.

On the Good Shepherd Sunday, pray for the priest and religious who have served you throughout your life. Encourage your children and grandchildren and other young people to consider if God is calling them to a life of priestly or religious service. Pray that God will give the Church faithful priests and religious who will give of themselves generously and tirelessly for the sake of the Gospel.

Father Matera