

A Homily for the 4th Sunday of Easter - Good Shepherd Sunday from Fr Allan

I've heard that in some parts today, the 4th Sunday of Easter, has been called, mischievously "Recruitment Sunday"! This is because, in all three cycles, we always reflect on a part of Jesus' "Good Shepherd" teaching. The Church connects the image of the Good Shepherd with the image of the ordained priest and so this day has become a day of prayer for vocations to the priesthood and religious life. Hence "Recruitment Sunday".

When priesthood is linked to the image of the Good Shepherd it certainly becomes very demanding and challenging. I can tell you that today is a day for a lot of soul searching! The Good Shepherd is caring, he knows his sheep. He is not a stranger to them and they answer to his call. The second part of today's gospel makes Jesus the 'gate' of the sheepfold as well as the shepherd. As the "Gate" he ensures not only the good health of the sheep but their actual lives as well! How does a person live up to all that?

The day of prayer for vocations and the religious life has been in existence ever since I was ordained 37 years ago. Even then people talked about a shortage of priests. A good friend of mine used to say that we have enough priests! She was a woman in her 40s. She added that what we haven't got is enough committed lay people! However, in 40 years things have changed and I think it's safe to say that today there IS a reduced interest in the priesthood. The reasons for this include such things as the model of priesthood that is currently practiced. The growth of secularisation is another reason. This has led to an absence of faith in the lives of many people. Society has become more materialistic and individualistic. Religious matters and the "sacred" in peoples' lives have taken a step back. So, perhaps it's not surprising that priesthood has become meaningless to many people.

Fr John Littleton who is the Director of the Priory Institute of Distance Learning in Dublin, says that a priest is a man who, having already been baptised receives the sacrament of holy orders... The priest is ordained to serve as a spiritual leader of God's people in the local Church. He imitates Jesus the Good Shepherd. This means that his essential role is to form and support a Christian community based upon the proclamation of God's word and the celebration of the sacraments... he presides at formal gatherings for worship, especially the celebration of the Eucharist... he facilitates people in the expression and nurturing of their relationship with God.

As I've already said this can be demanding and challenging. Sometimes things can be difficult. I do not know a priest who would say that they have fulfilled the vocation/calling fully. This seems to fit in with life in general. All vocations are challenging. We are very much aware of the challenges that the medical profession is facing at the moment. Many have the added challenges of family life. My admiration for them all at this time is unceasing. I am more than aware that the anxieties and worries of children, their education, a mortgage, furloughing, unemployment and many other things have been taken out of my sphere of life. In return I have received many rewards and privileges. It is a great privilege to be invited to share in the deepest joys and greatest sadnesses of people's lives. The priest has access that no one else has - literally no one.

In order for the community of Jesus Christ to function locally, nationally and internationally it will need all people to respond to the call of God. In having a day of prayer for vocations to the priesthood and religious life the Church is not denying the call to all people. However just as everyone is important, priests also are important and needed, even if they are, like

everyone else, prone to disillusionment and worries. Priests should be signs of hope and of God's presence especially when situations are distressing and seem to be without hope.

It may be that we are going through historic changes in the ways the Church organises itself and models itself. We are already being told that life will be different from now on. Please pray for the priests we have and that others will consider the life and vocation of a priest. We pray that we will cope with these changing times.

Prayer of Pope France for Vocations

LORD of the harvest.

BLESS young people with the gift of courage to respond to your call. Open their hearts to great ideals, to great things.

INSPIRE all of your disciples to mutual love and giving - for vocations blossom in the good soil of faithful people.

INSTILL those in religious life, parish ministries and families with confidence and grace to invite others to embrace the bold and noble path of a life consecrated to you.

UNITE us to Jesus through prayer and sacrament so that we may cooperate with you in building your reign of mercy and truth, of justice and peace. Amen

The Month of May

Some parishioners from All Hallows have been saying the Rosary every night at home at 9.00pm. This began as a prayer for all those affected by Coronavirus. We have now entered the month of May - the month of Mary. Traditionally it is a month in which the rosary is prayed. If anyone would like to join the group please do so. If anyone would like to know more please contact Marita Tel 07960 206916