

Fourth Sunday of Easter

Three sons left home, went out on their own and prospered. They discussed the gifts they could give their elderly mother. The first said: "I built a big house for our mother." The second said: "I sent her a Mercedes with a driver." The third said: "You remember how our mother enjoys reading the Bible. Now she can't see very well. So, I sent her a remarkable parrot that recites the entire Bible. It took elders in the church 12 years to teach him. Mama just has to name the chapter and verse and the parrot recites it." Soon thereafter, their mother sent out her letters of thanks. "Milton," she said, "The house you built is so huge. I live only in one room, but I have to clean the whole house. "Gerald," she said, "I am too old to travel. I stay most of the time at home so I rarely use the Mercedes. And that driver is so rude! He's a pain!" "But Donald," she said, "The little chicken you sent was delicious!"

Dear Friends,

The fourth Sunday of Easter is called Good Shepherd Sunday. This Sunday, we are asked to pray for the vocations as we remember the world day of prayer for vocations. Let us pray that the Diocese of Green Bay gets more vocations to the priests and consecrated life.

Today's readings help us to reflect Jesus as the good shepherd. There are two things that get focused today on being a good shepherd. The first one is the interaction between the shepherd and sheep. Or in other words, the encounter between the shepherd and the sheep. The interaction is constant and consistent. The shepherd knows the sheep by name. He calls out to them by name. You and I are called by name in our mother's womb. We read in Jeremiah 1: 5, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born, I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you". Isaiah 49:5, "For now the Lord has spoken who formed me as his servant from the womb." Secondly, we are called by name through our Baptism and other sacraments.

Pope Francis' message for this day: the Holy Father emphasizes that each human person is chosen by God, "created by love, for love, and with love and made for love." Recalling his own call to the priesthood, he explains that God's call, "tends to make itself known gradually" and one that calls for a response on our part. "Vocation is the interplay between divine choice and human freedom. God calls us in love and we, in turn, respond to him in love." He highlighted that every Christian is called to bear joyful witnesses. The Pope says, "the church is a vocational symphony."

The second point for our reflections today is that Jesus is the gate who protects everyone. Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, when he visited the United States in 2008, spoke that "today

it is extremely difficult for young men to hear the voice of God, because they are bombarded by so many different noises, so many different voices.”

Now, a sheep doesn't recognize the voice of the shepherd unless it already knows the shepherd. The difference, then, between being a lost sheep who is followed by the Shepherd and being a faithful sheep who follows the Shepherd is a matter of knowing the Shepherd.

To know a person is not like knowing the rules of the game. To know the rules is to know that this move is prohibited or that another move is the only one which can be made.

Knowing a person can't be parsed as knowing that anything-at-all. It's a matter of personal relationships. Personal relationships require openness to love, with all its risks.

Today this listening is needed. It can only happen through our prayer. Let us pray for those and for us that we have a constant dialogue with God through our prayer.