

Fourth Sunday of Easter

It's been said that every pastor ought to have six weeks of vacation each year, because if he is a really good shepherd, he deserves it; and if he is not a very good shepherd, his congregation deserves it.

Dear Friends,

Today we remember the Fourth Sunday of Easter! This is usually called Good Shepherd Sunday. Today we also remember the World Day of Prayer for Vocations. Let us pray for the vocation to the priesthood for our Diocese in a special way.

The image of the good shepherd is the image of a person who cares. He is not like the other, "who has no concern." He takes the time to get to know others, and he cares so much that he will even give his life to others. We have a God who cares for his flock through his love. He was inclusive and concerned for the lost sheep. He left the ninety-nine and sought for the lost one. His love is so great that no one is left out.

This Sunday Gospel really brings into how a good shepherd lays down his life for us. We all know about the collision of the Titanic on April 14-15, 1912. Although this tragedy leaves us with lots of questions, quite a few remarkable incidents of courage and sacrifice that emerged on board leave us with a sense of admiration and wonder. One of them is about three priests – Fathers - Thomas Byles, Juozas Montvila, and Joseph Benedikt Peruschitz. These three priests declined the offer of getting into the lifeboats and stayed on with the people, stranded on the ship, offering them final absolution, and praying with them as the ship plunged into the icy waters of the Atlantic. The bodies of the three priests were never recovered. Although all the three priests set out, each with his own 'private mission', they joined hands in the common mission of becoming shepherds of the abandoned people on board the Titanic.

We know a lot of examples in history of priests laying down their lives for the people. St. Maximilian Kolbe, Bishop Oscar Romero, Fr. Stan Swamy (India), and so on. Fr. Michael Judge, the Chaplain of the firefighters who died on 9/11.

Where do these priests get strength and models for their courageous and sacrificing life? It is from their families, especially their parents. We all need priests to have Eucharist. We as priests come from families. We need stronger marriages. So that we can have men and women become servants of God in a vocation. When we don't have stronger marriages, we don't have vocations. Marriage is a vocation and gift to serve God.

In the 1960s-1970s, and afterwards there were a lot of changes in our nation and around the world which affected the institution of marriage and stronger marriages. Cultural

evolution and other factors attack the institution of Marriage all over the world. I could see in my childhood that one of the spouses stayed home the other worked. In today's culture it is really hard for the spouses to stay home.

Decades of statistics have shown that, on average, married couples have better physical health, more financial stability, and greater social mobility than unmarried people.

Other studies show that the children of those couples are more likely to experience higher academic performance, emotional maturity, and financial stability than children who don't have both parents in the home.

Civil society—including community organizations, schools, and places of religious worship—must do its part to make sure the next generation understands the hard facts about the benefits of marriage and the costs of broken families. Armed with that knowledge, people can make better choices.

Marriage remains America's strongest anti-poverty, anti-crime, pro-health institution. It's an undeniable fact that the best chances for financial success, emotional well-being, and good health for both parents and children happen when parents are married, and families are intact.

Let us pray for stronger marriages in the church and vocations. Let us be the good shepherd who cares and shares.