

Rev. Derek Fairman

4th Sunday of Easter B

This Sunday is Good Shepherd Sunday, as well as the world day of prayer for vocations. We hear again the Lord's words, that He is the Good Shepherd. He lays down His life for His sheep. We know that the Lord Jesus has given up His life so that we may have life. He made His sacrifice on the Cross for our sake.

The Lord has given us the gift of our lives. He gives us physical life, but also spiritual life, beginning with Baptism. Yet there are so many ways that we can use this gift, so many options that are open to us. There are so many paths that we could take. This is true not just about our lives in general, but even on a daily basis. There are so many things that we can do with our day, so many ways to spend our days.

When we think about the Lord Jesus as the Good Shepherd, there can be many images that come to mind. We might think about how we look to the Lord for guidance when we are struggling, or how He comforts us when we are sad. Perhaps we think about the ways in which He leads us past death and into eternal life. However, the Lord Jesus also guides us in our vocations and He guides us by way of example.

In the Gospel that we heard, the Lord Jesus emphasizes that He is the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for His sheep. Throughout the centuries, there have been countless martyrs who have imitated the Lord Jesus by laying down their lives for the Lord Jesus. Their sacrifices then became an inspiration for others. They have imitated the Lord Jesus by making a sacrifice of their own lives.

We may not have to literally make a sacrifice of our lives, like those who have gone before us and those who are still martyred throughout the world today. Yet we have to ask ourselves, what have I made of my life? To what have I dedicated my life? Perhaps if we are younger, we have to ask ourselves, what will I make of the gift of life that I have received?

The Lord Jesus is the Good Shepherd who guides us. He sends His Holy Spirit into our hearts, to give us the guidance we need in our hearts and minds to make good decisions. He helps us to know what to do by speaking to us in our conscience. He helps us through our family and friends. He helps us to find those things that bring peace and fulfillment to each of us. Just as a shepherd leads the flock to good pastures, the Lord leads us to find nourishment and fulfillment.

The Lord Jesus also leads us by giving us an example to follow. We can dedicate our lives to serving others, just as the Lord Jesus did. Again, we may not be called upon to be martyrs; nonetheless when we dedicate our time and our lives to something bigger than our own egos, we make our lives a kind of sacrifice. When we live only for ourselves, for our own wealth, our own amusement and so on, we are like the hired hands that the Lord spoke about. The hired hands are only in it for themselves.

However, when we turn our lives into something that is dedicated to others, then we imitate the Lord Jesus, the Good Shepherd who came to serve and not be served. Even more than that, when we dedicate our lives to the Lord Jesus Himself, we find an even deeper meaning and purpose. The Lord Jesus told His Apostles that those who dedicate their lives to the Gospel will receive a hundred times more than what they have given up.

It is important that our young people pray about a vocation to the religious life, and in the case of young men, to the priesthood. It is important that our young people receive support and encouragement about the priesthood and the religious life. That means that praying for our young people and for vocations to priesthood and religious life is important for everyone, whether young or old. It is important not just for the future of the Church but for our young people.

Perhaps the most important part of receiving guidance from the Lord Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is prayer. It is difficult to receive guidance from the Lord Jesus if we do not know Him and never speak with Him in prayer. The Good Shepherd can only lead us and guide us if we are willing to listen. How can we listen to His voice without prayer? How could anyone dedicate his life or her life to someone without prayer?

We also keep in mind the importance of the spiritual nourishment we receive through our reception of the Sacrament of the Altar. In the Eucharist, we receive the Lord Jesus, the Good Shepherd who gave His life for us. At Mass, the true Sacrifice is present and we receive all the graces that flow from the Cross. The Lord Jesus gives us all the graces that we need, to be able to follow Him, all the wisdom that we need to make good choices, everything that we need to dedicate our lives to Him and to others.

As we approach the altar, may we receive the graces that we need to make our lives a sacrifice. We ask the Lord to give our young people the wisdom and graces that they need to be able to follow where the Lord Jesus is leading them. Ultimately, we do not choose our vocations; the Lord Jesus is the One who chooses us. So, we want to listen to His voice to choose wisely.