

Rev. Derek Fairman

4th Sunday of Easter B

This Sunday is Good Shepherd Sunday, as well as the world day of prayer for vocations. The Lord Jesus is the Good Shepherd, and the Lord calls others to Himself, that they may follow Him more closely and to imitate the Lord in His kindness and generosity and gentleness. The Lord draws us to Himself and invites us to follow the path that He has laid out for us.

One way in which we are drawn to the Lord is through holiness. Whenever we encounter genuine holiness, it is something that gives us a reverential fear. During His Public Ministry, whenever the Lord Jesus was teaching the people from the boat, He then asked Peter to cast his nets. St. Peter was reluctant, but when he did, the catch was overwhelming. Then St. Peter realized who the Lord Jesus was, and he said to the Lord, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man.” St. Peter realized that he was in the presence of the Holy One.

However, the Lord did not depart from him. The Lord Jesus called St. Peter to follow Him, and St. Peter did. Even though St. Peter realized that he was in the presence of the Holy One, and that he himself was a sinful man, yet he agreed to go along and follow the Lord. There was something about the Lord that drew St. Peter to the Lord Jesus. Even though being in the presence of holiness makes us aware of our own unworthiness, and our own sinfulness, yet there is something that draws us closer.

Holiness is something that draws people to the priesthood and religious life. Yes, there are many other things that do that, and yes there is that sense of unworthiness whenever we think about being close to the Lord. But still, holiness has a way of drawing us closer and inspiring us. Holiness is not something that we can simply ignore. Those in the priesthood and religious life who are holy can inspire others to follow the same path.

But this holiness has to be a genuine holiness. In the Gospel, the Lord speaks of the hired man who has no real concern for the flock. When it comes to holiness, there is an appearance of piety that can be considered inauthentic or phony. Sometimes there are ways in which people mistake piety or devotion for hypocrisy. To be sure, hypocrisy does not truly attract people, only holiness does. But true holiness is not inauthentic or phony.

However, what is authentic holiness? Sometimes people wonder what it means to be holy. People think about being genuine or authentic. People want to “keep things real.” However, being profane or having an attitude problem is not holy. People think that this is genuine or real,

but does it attract anyone? Is anyone really drawn into a mystery that way? Many times, it actually pushes people away. Sometimes others realize that this comes from a dark place in the soul, and who wants to enter into the darkness?

The Lord Jesus is the One who leads us into holiness and away from darkness. The Lord Jesus is the Good Shepherd who has created us and does not lead us down the wrong path. The Lord Jesus is the One who understands that we might be afraid of holiness. We can be afraid of holiness because we have to let go of things, we have to be different. The Lord Jesus is the One who leads us to understand that our path is towards who God meant us to be.

When it comes to becoming a better person, we need the Lord's guidance. Sometimes we find ourselves in a situation in which we know that we need to do better, or we are not happy with something in our lives. We know that we should do something different, but we are afraid to go past what we know. We are afraid to change, even if it is a change for the better. Other times, we know in our minds that we are not perfect, but we also have little desire to be perfect in our hearts. We simply accept our sinful inclinations and don't try to do better.

The Lord Jesus shepherds us by giving us the desire to do better. Of course, the Lord loves us unconditionally. He will not begin to love us only if we change, but He loves us now. That does not mean, however, that the Lord does not hold us accountable or that He does not invite us to become better. There are times when maybe we do not want to do better, we do not like the idea of growing in holiness, but the Lord continues to invite us down that path.

There can be other times when we are afraid to grow in holiness, to become better, to be more faithful and incorporate the Catholic faith into our lives. The Lord knows our fears and anxieties, and He wants to help us to overcome those fears. The Lord Jesus is the Good Shepherd, and He shepherds us because we need guidance and protection. Why? Because the transition to be holier and to be a better person can be something that frightens us, and we don't want to walk down that path.

We know, however, that the path to holiness is not something we have to walk alone. We have someone with us to help us through the difficult parts of letting things go that stand between us and God, and not just the Lord Jesus: we have an entire community of faith to help us. The Lord has also given us shepherds in the bishops and priests of the Church to help us. So, as we approach the altar, we ask the Good Shepherd to lead our souls in the ways of holiness, to leave behind whatever keeps us from being better and holier.