

## **Homily – 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter A**

On this *Good Shepherd Sunday* and the *World Day of Prayer for Vocations*, the Church reminds us of our call to become good shepherds of God's flock and good sheep of His parishes and invites us to pray for vocations to the priesthood, the diaconate and the consecrated life. Both the Old and New Testaments use the image of a Shepherd and His flock to describe the unique relationship of God with Israel and of Christ with Christians.

The first reading is taken from St. Peter's first sermon, given on the day of Pentecost. He reminds his Jewish listeners that they have crucified their true Shepherd. Hence, they need to receive forgiveness for their sin by getting baptized in the name of Jesus and acknowledging the risen Jesus as their Lord and Savior, as Jesus had commanded.

In the second reading, Peter encourages the suffering Christians to follow in the footsteps of their Good Shepherd, Jesus, the "suffering servant," realizing the truth that Jesus' suffering and death have enabled them to become more fully the children of God.

In today's Gospel, two brief parables show us Jesus, the first, as a selfless, caring "shepherd" who provides for his sheep protection and life itself, and the second, as our unique gateway ("sheep gate"), to eternal salvation. That is, besides guiding his flock to Eternal Life as the Good Shepherd, Jesus is himself the gateway to Eternal Life.

Messages: 1) We need to become good shepherds and good leaders: Everyone who is entrusted with the care of others is a shepherd. Hence, pastors, parents, teachers, doctors, nurses, government officials, and caregivers, among others, are all shepherds. We become good shepherds by loving those entrusted to us, praying for them, spending our time, talents and blessings for their welfare, and guarding them from physical and spiritual dangers. Parents must be especially careful of their duties toward their children, giving them good example and instruction and training them in Christian principles.

2) We need to become good sheep in the fold of Jesus, the Good Shepherd: Our local parish is our sheepfold, and our pastors are our shepherds. Jesus is the High Priest, the Bishops are the successors of the Apostles, the pastors are their helpers and the parishioners are the sheep. Hence, as the good sheep of the parish, parishioners are expected to a) Hear and follow the voice of our shepherds through their homilies, Bible classes, counseling and advice. b) Receive the spiritual food given by our pastors through our regular participation in the Holy Mass, our frequenting of the Sacraments, and our participation in the prayer services, renewal programs and missions they offer. c) Cooperate with our pastors by giving them positive suggestions for the welfare of the parish, by encouraging them in their duties, by offering them loving, and always by praying for them d) Actively participate in the activities of various councils, ministries and parish associations.