

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This weekend is Good Shepherd Sunday. Every year, on the fourth Sunday in Easter, we hear from the tenth chapter of the Gospel of John, which speaks about Jesus being the Good Shepherd. It is because of this that the Church has named the fourth Sunday in Easter as the World Day of Prayer for Vocations.

In the Gospel today, Jesus says, **“My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me”** (John 10:27). This speaks so profoundly about vocations, because vocation means “Calling.” Who does the calling? Jesus, of course! He is the One who calls us to follow Him. It is only in listening to His voice that we find our purpose, the meaning for our lives. Many times, though, we think of vocation only as the calling to priesthood, religious life, or the diaconate.

The truth is each one of us has a calling. Jesus is calling each of us to a unique way of living His love and life in the world. That calling does have a form of life (marriage, celibacy for the kingdom, single life of service), but it goes deeper than this: it permeates every aspect of our lives, into every moment, calling us to live the unique call of God for *my life*. You see, for those of us who have “found our vocations” (for instance, if you are already married), it doesn’t mean that we are done discerning our vocations. No, God continues to call us in this place, in this time, in these circumstances of our lives to grow closer to Him, to serve His people in a unique way, to live His love in our particular circumstances.

This is important to remember, especially when we speak about and pray for vocations. Why? If a teenager thinks that his vocation is either marriage or priesthood, and that’s all that his vocation is, he might think, “I’m too young to get married or go into the Seminary, so I don’t really need to think about my vocation right now,” or he may think, “Well, I don’t really have a place or purpose in my life right now, since I’m too young for a vocation.” The reality is, this teen has a vocation *right now* – it is to be a student, a son, and maybe a brother. He might miss God’s call for his life in this moment if he thinks vocation is something for the future.

On the other hand, if we have “found” our vocation, we may miss the particular call for God in my life right now. For instance (since this is Mother’s Day), a wife and mother may think that since she “has” her vocation, she doesn’t need to wonder about how God wants her to live her vocation in the here and now. When she recognizes God’s call in ordinary, in the spit up and dirty diapers, in the “daily grind” of life, the ordinary can become extraordinary!

Then we look at those who are widows or widowers. If vocation is just the “state of life,” they may think, “I *had* a vocation, but my spouse died. Now I don’t have a vocation anymore.” Again, the truth is that God is calling each of us, in this moment. He has a unique plan, a unique calling for each of us in the here and now. We never “had” a vocation; we always *have* a vocation!

This weekend, the Church asks us to pray in a special way for Vocations. Since you know that each of us has a vocation, a calling, in this place and in this time, it is truly a call to pray for each person (including ourselves) to know what God is doing in our lives, and how to respond. It is only in saying “yes” to God that we truly find our fulfillment. I invite you to ask God to give each of us the courage to say “yes” to God in this moment, to the call to holiness, the call to follow Him, the call to serve Him and the people around us, here and now.

May the Good Shepherd continue to lead us closer to His Heart. May we listen for His voice this day; may we hear it and follow Him, and, in following Him, may we find our true fulfillment: the unique purpose God has for each of us.