

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER -- B 22 April 2018  
Vocations Sunday

Imagine 30 kindergarteners going on a field trip to the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago. The teacher has been with these students five days a week for about eight months now. She knows who are friends, and who to keep apart. She knows who will wander, and who the "touchers" are. She knows who will forget lunch, and who will need to make eleven trips to the bathroom. And she decides to go anyway! The teacher of the kindergarten gives us a little insight into what it's like to be a shepherd is like.

I would propose that a kindergarten teacher is a modern example of Jesus the good shepherd. Jesus knows all our quirks – who needs to wander off on their own, and who will hang close by, who need to try things out for themselves and who will pay close attention -- and He loves us all.

So that's part of the Gospel – it's about Jesus the shepherd who says, "I know my sheep." Another part is "My sheep know me." For the sheep have to learn to hear and trust the voice of the shepherd. In Jesus' time a shepherd could stand in the midst of whole mixed-up flocks, and by calling them could separate them out from the others. Trust in the shepherd allows him to lead the sheep to water or direct them away from danger.

We must learn to recognize the Lord's voice speaking to us from among many other voices, to hear his voice among the sounds, distractions, and temptations of the world. He speaks to us through our prayer, through reading and hearing the Scriptures, and through our conversation with fellow Christians.

All of us learn to listen and follow the voice of Jesus the good shepherd. In doing so we the sheep live out our vocation that was initiated and empowered by our baptism.

But some of us also hear a particular call from the Good Shepherd -- not simply to follow him, but to live a life which more closely models the Good Shepherd himself. Some of us are called to a life of service who know the sheep, who care for the sheep, who lead the sheep. Our shepherds who are lay ministers and clergy stand with the sheep to point them toward lifegiving water and to keep them from danger. The parish staff are not simply our hired hands. Rather, having heard the voice of the Shepherd, they walk with us while helping us to hear the Shepherd's voice and follow his lead.

And so I invite you to pray for four things today: first, that all of us try to listen carefully to the Good Shepherd who is trying to guide us and protect us. Second, that we pray in thanksgiving for the people who during our lives have been good models of shepherding, Christian caring, and leadership. Third, we pray for those who serve us now, that they do so wholeheartedly and joyfully, willing to lay down their lives for those they are called to serve. And finally, we pray for those among us whom the Good Shepherd is calling to model their lives after his in a unique life of service in the Sacrament of Orders or in shared community life as a member of a religious community, those who will serve us in years to come.

