

REFLECTION by Fr. Anthony Davis

"... The sheep hear his voice, as the shepherd calls his own sheep by name and leads them out."

May 3, 2020

4th Sunday of Easter (Year A)

Acts 2:14a, 36-41; 1 Peter 2:20b-25; John 10:1-10

This Gospel passage echoes words I have used countless times when I baptize children. "What name do you give this child?" A simple question I ask of the parents, and yet so profound. It means that no one goes to the waters of baptism anonymously. There are no strangers in the shepherd's flock. God calls us by name to follow him. Thus, he assures us today: "I am the good Shepherd; I know my sheep, and mine know me...And the sheep hear my voice, as a shepherd calls his own by name and leads them out". That is our vocation, our calling!! Hence, as we do every year on the 4th Sunday of Easter, today on Good Shepherd Sunday we also celebrate "World Day of Prayer for Vocations."

Today, the Church is asked to pray for vocations to the priesthood and religious life. Indeed, for more than a millennium, the Church has relied on a cohort of priests to celebrate the sacraments and to guide the faithful. But the number of priests has plummeted dramatically in the past 40 years, while the Catholic population has increased. Yes, we must pray fervently for an increase in vocations to the priesthood and the religious life, since we need more pastors - more shepherds.

In fact, when we are asked to pray for vocations, we know it means vocations to the priesthood and religious life. This has been the common understanding of the word "vocations" for a long time. But, when we use the word so narrowly, we tend to lose sight of its fuller meaning.

That is why Pope Francis' Message for the 51st World Day of Prayer for Vocations 2014, is so refreshing. He reminds us that we all have a true vocation. By our baptism, we are called to holiness, our call to follow the Good Shepherd whatever our walk, in life is. "Both in the married life and in the forms of religious consecration, as well as the priestly life," Pope Francis writes, "We must surmount the ways of thinking and acting that do not conform to the will of God. We must be on a journey of adoration of the Lord and of service to him in our brothers and sisters." Yes, "I have called you by your name, and you are mine..."

Life Message: We need to emphasize very strongly that every single baptized person has a 'vocation'. In other words, everyone is called by God to play a specific role in the Christian community and in the wider community. Unless we Christians see that 'vocation' is something that we are all called to, it is not likely that there will be enough people to meet the service needs of our Christian communities. Hence our Christian communities can only grow and thrive when every member makes a contribution of self (not only money), to the well-being of the whole.

Conclusion: This is a beautiful understanding of baptism. It is the universal call to holiness. Hence, the clarion call by Peter on the repentant crowd who enquired about what to do, by answering: "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins; and you will receive the Holy Spirit" (1st Reading). Therefore, today, we urgently pray for an increase in vocations to the priesthood and religious life. But we also pray that those of us who may not be priests or religious, also remain faithful to our vocation - our baptismal call - by conforming ourselves to God's will. The Good Shepherd calls each of us by name to follow him in building up the Body of Christ. For, "I came so that you may have life and have it more abundantly"!!!