

Reflections on Good Shepherd – 2021

Pastors have shepherding responsibilities. The words “pastor” and “pastoral” come from the same root as laboring for the flock of God entrusted to our care. Seen this way, we reflect on the role of pastors: priests, leaders in society, parents, teachers, parish councilors and workers in various church ministries, all are workers in the Lord’s vineyard. “The vineyard of the Lord is the house of Israel,” now the whole wide world. Good Shepherd weekend offers us the opportunity to reflect on how we are exercising our roles. Because we belong to the flock, not just as lone workers, let us emphasize collaborative ministry in our parishes, in our world, assisting one another, teamwork in order to achieve our common goals together. We are not hired laborers who work just for pay and so may not show real concern for the community. We work voluntarily out of the love of God that has been poured into our hearts. Our aim in shepherding is not just a social gathering, or just to draw people to faith, as it were. Not necessarily! Most people in this age already have faith in the Lord. Our shepherding phase should now become that of a new evangelization, I think, to assist and lead our people to deeper and greater growth and fellowship with Christ and one another. By our teamwork spirit we grow together in the Lord. By today’s Gospel, it is necessary that we hear the message on the qualities of a good shepherd. Parents and leaders share in this role for their roles in the families and the society we live in. It anticipates knowledge and acceptance of the flock and vice versa, love, cherish, self-giving, and sacrifice since the Mass in which we participate in worship is itself a sacrifice. If I may ask then, what ministries are you involved in? How, and in what spirit, do you exercise them?

Today is also vocations weekend for the ministerial priesthood and religious life. The Christian family is the bedrock for vocations to the priesthood and religious life. Parents ought to encourage their children on this as they do with choice of careers, and young folks ought to give it a consideration too. The way fathers and mothers live their lives must challenge their children to become good children, beautiful for God. Our families must truly become symbols of the Church, thereby becoming something of “a small Church” and the fertile soil for vocations to flourish. The family is to prepare the ground for vocations to take root, grow and bear fruit for the Church. Family prayers together can still be achieved in some ways nowadays, and grace over the meals as Jesus taught us at the Last Supper and at Emmaus. Parent’s duties include Church worship of God as a family as they encourage their children’s education. Nourishing vocations, therefore, is what good Christian families and good marriages owe the Church. In this way, the Christian marriage is itself a vocation by which the family cooperates with God by being “fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it” (Gen. 1:28), and produce worthy worshippers for God; and so make the world a better place. Therefore, vocations are not only to the priesthood and religious life but have the third wing which is the good Christian family (parenthood). How do you encourage your pastors in their ministries? Young people want to see how pastors are loved and cared for in order to commit their lives entirely for others too. Pastors do not work for money, and should not, because their stipend or allowance is not commensurate to their level and hours of labor. It is merely a token. As St. Paul said, the love of Christ urges us on; and St. Peter said it is not for monetary gains. We all have the duty to pray for vocations and to encourage vocations in the Catholic Church.

In conclusion, our first reading from Acts 4 resonates on salvation through Jesus. In the Holy Name of Jesus, the leaders of the people and elders must witness for Jesus in all our good deeds. We are celebrating that Jesus is the Good Shepherd, the stone rejected by the builders which has become the cornerstone of our faith in God. Hence, we now know that, “there is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved,” (Acts 4:12). For that reason, we live and treat each other and one another as beloved children of God, and sharers of his kingdom with Christ. (cf. 1 John 3:1-2).