

Fourth Sunday of Easter

All of us could ask the question, “How is it that we are who we are, doing what we are doing now, in this place?” We may not be able to answer the question to the satisfaction of others, but those of us who have been gifted with faith in Jesus, may be able to say that we are who we are right now because this is where God calls us to be. We are doing what we are doing now because we are fulfilling the vocation that God has given to us.

This fourth Sunday of Easter is an opportunity for all of us to thank God that we have been called to live as disciples of Jesus in whatever way Jesus has called us to be. On this Mother’s Day we thank God for the vocation of motherhood. We give praise to God for our own mothers and if that is our own vocation, we thank God for the gift of that call.

Today I thank God for my vocation to be a priest. I thank God that God has been faithful to me as I have tried to live that vocation for over fifty years. But none of us can recognise and accept a vocation on our own. I can look back with immense gratitude to the people and the events that have helped me to listen to the call made to me. I grew up in a family who taught me how to relate to God. My family was not perfect, but my parents were great models for me of people for whom God and his Church were important. In all their difficulties they

trusted in God and gave me every opportunity to become a person of faith.

I sometimes think how fortunate I have been to have had the parish priests that I have lived and worked with. I remember them as holy men who taught me those pastoral skills that I try to live out now. But we priests probably learn most from the people that we are called to serve. We are challenged and encouraged to live our vocations as priests by coming to know something of how you live yours as parents, as husbands and wives, as single people generously living your lives for others. We learn from you who live your call to follow Jesus in a world that is so often hostile to his way of living and loving.

I think that we can all be encouraged by today’s gospel. “The sheep that belong to me listen to my voice; I know them and they follow me.” Jesus the Good shepherd draws us to him and feeds us with nothing less than a share in his own life. “I give them eternal life.” That life that Jesus offers to us makes us one with him. Jesus invites us into a union with him that has no end. We know now that we are in union with Jesus by the power of his Spirit of love at work within us. We become aware that this Spirit moves us to do things that are beyond us. But we can never really see all that God is doing in and through us. We cannot know how close our God is to us

in this life. All will be made clear when we are called to meet God face to face.

Our second reading today from the Book of the Apocalypse gives a glimpse of how things might look like in heaven. John's vision tells us first that there is room for everyone there. "I saw a huge number impossible to count, of people from every nation, race, tribe and language;" These people are standing before God's throne and before the Lamb who has been sacrificed for us. It is a powerful image that is used of Jesus taking the sins of humankind upon himself and reconciling the whole world to God and to one another. This Lamb has risen from the dead and now draws all people to him.

The reading goes on to say that "the Lamb who is at the throne will be their shepherd and will lead them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away all tears from their eyes." What we need to remind ourselves is that John's vision describes not just something that awaits us in heaven, but it describes the present reality of God's relationship with us. God does not become the one who leads us to springs of living water when we die. He does that every day for us. Every day God wipes away our tears.

In our Gospel Jesus speaks today about his protective love for us. He says that his sheep will never be lost and no one will ever steal them from him. Jesus speaks about his Father being the source of that protective love that he has for us. The Father has entrusted us into the care of Jesus, and it is the power of the Father's love for us that keeps us safe. Jesus speaks in this way because he reminds us that he and the Father are one. We are drawn into that union.

As my retirement draws a little closer, I am often asked, "What are you going to do when you retire?" I do not really know what I will be doing. But I do know what I will be. I will still be a disciple of Jesus. I will still be a priest serving the Lord in whatever way he calls me. On this vocations awareness Sunday may we all have a deeper sense of who we are. May we all listen well for the ways that Jesus calls us to live our vocations as his disciples. May we help to create a place where others may hear that call too and with our encouragement and prayer answer the call that God makes.