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4th Sunday of Easter / Vocations Sunday

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This Sunday's Gospel John 10 : 1-10

Jesus said : "I tell you most solemnly, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold through the gate, but gets in some other way is a thief and a brigand. The one who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the flock; the gatekeeper lets him in, the sheep hear his voice, and one by one he calls his own sheep and leads them out. When he has brought out his flock, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow because they know his voice. They never follow a stranger but run away from him. They do not recognise the voice of strangers."

Jesus told them this parable, but they did not understand what he meant by telling it to them. So Jesus spoke to them again : "I tell you most solemnly, I am the gate of the sheepfold. All others who have come are thieves and brigands; but the sheep took no notice of them. I am the gate. Anyone who enters through me will be safe : he will go freely in and out and be sure of finding pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come so that they may have life, and have it to the full."

Reflection :

What a beautiful image. Jesus is the shepherd, the gatekeeper and the gate. In Palestine where Jesus lived it was not uncommon for stone sheepfolds to have no door or gate at all. At night the shepherd lay down across the opening, so that if the sheep wanted to go out they had to do so by going over him. In that sense he was laying down his life for them, out of love and care. Sometimes, and none more so in our current situation, we are asked to lay down our lives for others, not die as ultimately Jesus did for us but simply forget ourselves and put others first, even when it is difficult. And yet, it can still be so tempting to preserve ourselves by thinking, or even saying out loud - "I'm not going to let them walk all over Me!"

Bishop Paul's Pastoral Letter

Bishop Paul's Pastoral Letter for this Sunday

**A PASTORAL LETTER
FROM THE BISHOP OF LANCASTER**

For Good Shepherd Sunday weekend 4/5/May 2020

My dear People,

It would be easy to begin by focussing on the problem dominating the news, but that temptation must be resisted. Not long ago the news was dominated by another subject; BREXIT. We got tired of it, made a joke of it, prayed for it to go away, and now look! Living in the world we are affected by the course of current events to a greater or lesser degree, but, as people of Faith, our roots are found in richer soil.

I am writing this as we approach the end of Easter Week. My news is dominated by the fact that Jesus is risen from the dead, and has come back to us. He has not brought a detailed description of 'life on the other side'. Rather, He brings a simple, one-word message, 'Peace!'. Before His Passion and the immediate horrors of Holy Week, He gave explicit teaching on the nature of His peace, giving important details in a passage recorded by St John.

'Peace I bequeath to you, My own peace I give you. A peace the world cannot give, this is My gift to you.' John 14:27

His gift of His peace was not just for those disciples at that time. It is for us, and for these times, and for all times.

To be caught up in a national emergency taking place within a global crisis is new ground for many of us. Knowing how to cope, how to respond, how to plan can be daunting. Having said that, there is something very attractive when I realise that, as a Catholic Christian, I am asked to do nothing new; only have faith in Christ. Remember that Faith, return to that Faith, look after that Faith, practise that Faith.

There will be personal, social and economic consequences caused by the pandemic that will take years to adjust to. Loss of family members, lost jobs, lost businesses create a new landscape within which we will have to live. At the moment, the streets are strangely quiet and, on the face of it, peaceful, but we are aware too of intense activity and anxiety in health care, in hospitals and care homes, to whom we owe a huge debt of thanks. More broadly, mental health cries out for attention. We are conscious of isolated, hidden individuals, silently struggling with all the uncertainties of Covid-19. Politicians, leaders and scientists grapple with how to manage society in order to protect social order so that we come through the next weeks and months as well as possible. We are living in fog, and can as yet only speculate on how long it will be before it begins to thin and lift. Even then, we don't know if it will return.

The Church is the guardian and keeper of the Easter Mysteries. The relevance of these Mysteries brings reassurance not only to ourselves as believers. The soul is beyond the reach of this particular virus. Whilst we follow the instructions to STAY AT HOME :

PROTECT THE NHS : SAVE LIVES, we remember the gift of the life of the Spirit. It is a reality easily lost sight of if we allow ourselves to become dominated by news headlines. Our Blessed Lord patiently waits for us to remember, rediscover and return.

Prayer at home is being given a new lease of life. Please God, this will be a happy and lasting legacy of the crisis. Through various means efforts are being made throughout the parishes of the Diocese to look after each other and keep us true to pastoral care. This is not solely the responsibility of the clergy, although they obviously have to be active in many new ways. I am grateful for all being done in families to help keep us faithful to preserving Sunday as the Lord's Day. With so much 'on offer' via the internet it is important to use discretion regarding what we turn to and what we use. But there are vast numbers of parishioners who either cannot or prefer not to use online aids. We cannot presume this service is available to everyone. The wise pastor does not 'put all his eggs in one basket'!

I am immensely grateful for all who are simply going about the business of doing whatever they can to make sure our diocese, parishes and schools continue to function. Education, Tribunal, Health, Safeguarding, Finance, Property, Websites and Voice all still require attention. I commend those parishioners who have arranged to make their financial contributions through Direct Debit. (It would be wonderful if even more changed to this arrangement.) I thank God for our convents, engaged in various apostolates within the Diocese, all witnessing to the beauty of Religious Life. May they continue to shine as beacons of joy in the Risen Lord.

Please keep our seminarians in your prayers. They are in very unusual circumstances, and could easily find this unwelcome disturbance to their formation troubling. Pray for Stuart Chapple due to be ordained deacon in June, for Philip Wrigley in his fourth year of formation, Simon Marley two terms into his pro-paedeutic year at Valladolid, Spain, and for James Knight undergoing an extended time of discernment at St Clare's, Preston. Dare to hope for an increase of vocations to the Priesthood as a fruit of our present sacrifices.

In conclusion, I take this opportunity to thank you for the many expressions of support and encouragement I have received. Enforced isolation comes with certain consolations, and I am fortunate to live in generous accommodation with pleasant gardens, thanks to the hard work and foresight of Bishop Campbell. As a Diocese we were already facing the need to make adjustments. Present constraints only emphasise the need for decisions. All will be done with God's guidance, and in order for us to continue living our Faith, carrying the unchanging Good News of Christ's Resurrection into the days ahead. We have the example of those who have gone before us, those who have completed their work. Above all, we have the example of Christ, the Good Shepherd who never leaves His flock untended. The Lord calls on us, to follow Him with charity and prayer in the Light of Easter.

With my blessing for each of you,

Paul, Bishop of Lancaster

A Prayer Service for Vocations Sunday to be Used at Home

Light a candle, safely – or if you have a battery one, put it on....and have it lit for the day – and each hour pray: " Lord, send labourers into your harvest."

Today we pray for all those being called to the priesthood, diaconate, or religious life. May they have the courage to discern this call, listen to God's voice, and overcome the pressures that our culture puts upon them to ignore their path in life.

As we gather, we remember and pray:

The light of Christ surrounds us.

The love of Christ enfolds us.

The power of Christ protects us.

The presence of Christ watches over us.

And wherever we are, God is with us. And all is well!



Pope Francis invites us :

Dear friends, on this day in particular, but also in the ordinary pastoral life of our communities, I ask the Church to continue to promote vocations. May she touch the hearts of the faithful and enable each of them to discover with gratitude God's call in their lives, to find courage to say "yes" to God, to overcome all weariness through faith in Christ, and to make of their lives a song of praise for God, for their brothers and sisters, and for the whole world. May the Virgin Mary accompany us and intercede for us.

Psalm: A Prayer of Gratitude and Praise, Edward Hayes

All: Blessed are you, Lord our God, who has given to all of us a destiny and purpose in our lives.

Side 1: We thank You, God of Mysterious ways,
that You have a holy design for us.
We rejoice that we are special to You,
That our names are written in the palm of Your hand
and our place in history, our purpose for existing,
is known within our heart, since endless ages.

Side 2: Blessed are You, inscrutable Lord,
for those events, persons, talents and loves
which have helped us to discover adventure and purpose,
fruitfulness and meaning, in our sometimes empty
and seemingly insignificant lives.

Side 1: We are grateful for that long line of holy people,
who since ancient times have inspired others
by their faithfulness to their own destinies.
They by their very lives, shout out to us
not to compromise our destiny

but to live fully within Your eternal design.

Side 2: Blessed are You, for colleagues, teachers, parents,
family and friends who call us out
from the cocoon of comfort and contentment
to embark upon that unique path
which You have sent forth for each of your sons and daughters.

**ALL: Glory to you, Source of All life, Eternal Word and Holy Spirit.
As it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. Amen.**

**All: Blessed are You, Lord our God, who has given us a destiny and purpose in life.
Amen.**

Reflection and Sharing (prepared by Sr Mary Deane pbvm)

In his message for the World Day of Prayer for Vocations (2020), Pope Francis gives us four key words to reflect on against the backdrop of the Gospel passage that recounts for us the remarkable experience of Jesus and Peter during a stormy night on the Sea of Galilee (cf. *Mt 14:22-33*).

The Four key words are: - ***Gratitude, Encouragement, Fatigue and Praise.***

Gratitude

Every vocation is born of that gaze of love with which the Lord came to meet us, perhaps even at a time when our boat was being battered by the storm. "Vocation, more than our own choice, is a response to the Lord's unmerited call". We will succeed in discovering and embracing our vocation once we open our hearts in gratitude and perceive the passage of God in our lives.

As I reflect on my own vocation what do I want to give gratitude for?

Encouragement

The Lord knows that a fundamental life choice – like marriage or special consecration to his service – calls for *courage*. He knows the questions, doubts and difficulties that toss the boat of our heart, and so he reassures us: "Take heart, it is I; have no fear!" We know in faith that he is present and comes to meet us, that he is ever at our side even amid stormy seas. This knowledge sets us free from that lethargy which I have called "sweet sorrow", the interior discouragement that hold us back from experiencing the beauty of our vocation.

Can you name someone or something that encourages or has encouraged you to continue your journey even when you have faced doubts and difficulties?

Fatigue

Every vocation brings with it a responsibility. Sometimes we can feel daunted by the responsibilities – whether in married life or priestly ministry – or by the hardships in store for us, then we will soon turn away from the gaze of Jesus and, like Peter, we will begin to sink. On the other hand, despite our frailty and poverty, faith enables us to walk towards the Risen Lord and to weather every storm. Whenever fatigue or fear make us start to sink, Jesus holds out his hand to us. He gives us the enthusiasm we need to live our vocation with joy and fervour.

Can you name some ways that Jesus holds out his hand to you and helps you to live your vocation with joy and fervour?

Praise

Even amid the storm-tossed waters, then, our lives become open to *praise*. This is the last of our vocation words, and it is an invitation to cultivate the interior disposition of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Grateful that the Lord gazed upon her, faithful amid fear and turmoil,

Help us to open our hearts and homes to others, even when we feel too old, too busy, or too tired.

As you once inspired our founder, and moved to make radical choices, so now breathe new life and vision into us, urging us to be a congregation of presence and service, now and in the future. Amen. *from: Opening our Hearts and Homes, NRVC*

Jesus Christ, you are risen from the dead and always shepherding your Church, in your Holy Spirit, bless us with courage, now and forever.
Amen.

To read Pope Francis' Message for the 57th World Day of Prayer for Vocations 2020 -
www.vatican.va › [messages](#) › [vocations](#) › [documents](#)

Monday (Cardinal Basil Hume)

Repent, we are told, turn away from sin. Believe the Gospel not as an ideology to talk about, not as an abstract system of values to be discussed among learned persons. Conversion begins deep within ourselves, it involves radical change inside ourselves which then alters the way we relate to God and to fellow human beings. It is a change of heart. It leads us to embrace wholeheartedly what the Gospel says and to love Him who says it.

Scripture (Acts 2:36-41)

You can be certain that the Lord and Christ whom God has made is this Jesus whom you crucified. Hearing this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'What are we to do?' 'You must repent,' Peter answered, 'And everyone of you must be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.' He spoke to them and urged them, 'Save yourselves from this perverse generation.'

Tuesday (Henri Nouwen)

Following Jesus demands of you in the first place obedience to his Gospel. Don't be afraid that this obedience will impoverish your personality. No laws, no rules, no therapy no discussions, are capable of setting our communities in order and making them fruitful if the Spirit of Jesus is not reigning there. Free yourself from a world that seeks only pleasures and possessions. Through your radical surrender to God, you will be free from this.

Scripture (2 Corinthians 3:14-18)

Until this very day, the veil remains over the reading of the Old Testament to those with closed minds: it is not lifted, for only in Christ is it done away with. Their hearts are covered with a veil, and this veil will not be taken away until they turn to the Lord. Now this Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And all of us, with our unveiled faces like mirrors reflecting the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the image that we reflect in brighter and brighter glory; this is the working of the Lord who is the Spirit.

Wednesday (Thomas Merton)

In Christ God is made man. In him, God and man are no longer separate, remote from one another, but inseparably one. In Christ everything that is divine and supernatural becomes accessible on the human level to every one of us. What is divine has now become connatural to us in Christ's love so that if we receive him and are united to him in friendship, he who is at the same time God and our brother, grants us the divine life that is now able to be ours on our human level.

Scripture (Colossians 1:13-20)

God has rescued us from the ruling force of darkness and has transferred us to the kingdom of the Son that he loves, and in him we enjoy our freedom, the forgiveness of sin. He is the image of the unseen God, the first-born of all creation, for in him were created all things in heaven and on earth. All things were created through him and for him. He exists before all things and in him all things hold together, and he is the head of the body, that is, the Church. God wanted all fullness to be found in him and through him to reconcile all things to him by making peace through his death on the cross.

Thursday (Fr. Richard Rohr.)

Relationship is a by-product of a journey shared between those seeking the same goal, between those who eat the same bread and drink from the same cup. A *companion*, literally, is "one who eats bread with us." Jesus calls us to be his companion on the journey to the Father. He says: Walk with me. Trust my faith. Trust my love. Trust my hope. And I will walk with you. He is a partner. He is a brother. He eats bread with us. Christians are afraid to believe how deep, real and powerful that relationship is between companions of Jesus, those who are on the same path together.

Scripture (John 10:2-4,9-10)

He who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the flock; the gatekeeper lets him in, the sheep hear his voice, one by one he calls his own sheep and leads them out. He goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow because they know his voice. I am the gate. Anyone who enters through me will be safe: such a one will go in and out and will find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come that you may have life and have it to the full.

Friday (William Law)

Do not all Christians desire to have Christ as their saviour? Yes, but here is the deceit; all would have Christ to be their saviour in the next world and to help them into heaven when they die. But his salvation, if it is to be had, must be had in this world, by changing and altering all that is within you,

by helping you to a new heart.

Scripture (Romans 3:21-25)

God's saving justice was witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, but now it has been revealed altogether apart from law: God's saving justice given in faith through Jesus Christ to all who believe. No distinction is made: all have sinned and lack God's glory, and all are justified by the free gift of his grace through being set free in Christ Jesus. God appointed him as a sacrifice for reconciliation, through faith, by shedding his blood.

Martin Bennett