

## Good Shepherd/World Day of Prayer for Vocations/

### Blessing of New Roof

May 7, 2017 Fourth Sunday of Easter St. Joseph, Battle Creek

I think it's still very appropriate to wish you a very Happy Easter. We're here in this joyful Easter season, in the middle of the beautiful Springtime we're experiencing all around us. This time of new life in nature and as we celebrate Easter gives us hope, even in the midst of the problems we face in our daily lives, and at times, even the tragic circumstances that this community experienced in recent days. I know that we all keep those who are suffering due to this current tragedy in our prayers. **Jesus is Alive**, and that gives us hope in all circumstances.

Today is the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter, and is traditionally known as "Good Shepherd Sunday". However, as we heard in today's Gospel, it might be more appropriate to be known as the "Loving Voice Sunday" or the "Saving Gate" Sunday.

In today's First Reading, we heard Peter giving his first sermon after Pentecost, and he told the people that Jesus, whom they all had a hand in killing, was truly revealed by God to be "Lord" and "the Christ". The people were truly remorseful once they understood his words and asked: "*Brothers, what can we do?*" Peter's answer was: "*Repent and be baptized.*" As those who are baptized into Christ, we know that "repentance" is an ongoing need in each of our lives so that we can remain close to Christ.

We also sang and prayed together in today's Psalm Response the beautiful phrase: "*The Lord is my Shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.*" That is from the treasured Psalm 23 that many of us probably know off by heart, and which we find ourselves praying in times of trouble, sadness, confusion or concern.

And in today's Gospel, Jesus doesn't so much talk about Himself as the Good Shepherd (though He does do so in subsequent parts of St. John's Gospel), but as the "Loving Voice" or the "Saving Gate". Jesus tells us that our relationship with Him is one based on His love for us--it's a relationship of tenderness and protection; it's about intimacy and concern. He tells us that just as a sheep recognizes and trusts the voice of the Shepherd, so do we hear His Voice and come to Him because we trust and love Him. I'm sure that anyone here who has a pet, in particular a dog, knows that first hand. The dog recognizes the voices of those with whom the

dog lives; those the dog knows. Or in an even more beautiful image, any mother here knows that she will recognize and know her child's voice in need, even in a roomful of noises and distractions, because she is so tuned into her child whom she loves with all her heart.

Now the question is: do we give Him enough opportunity to hear our voice? Do we spend time in prayer? Do we come to Mass? Do we acknowledge Him in our lives? And beyond that, do we recognize Jesus' voice? In our contemporary society-----the voice of Jesus can easily be drowned out by many other "voices"-----the cries of "you must have this/that"-----the constant distraction of cell phones: messages/texts/facebook/video games/etc.----the many "voices" that try to entice us to ways of darkness---addictions, etc.

As we think about St. Peter's sermon which touched people deeply, bringing them to ask what they should do, that's an important question for us to ask as well: What do we do?

Jesus tells us to listen for His voice, follow Him where He leads, to let Him be our gate, because that is the only way for us to find our salvation. And as the Church tells us, there is only salvation through the name of Jesus.

Today as we gather for the special reason of the Blessing of the new roof, and give thanks to God for the generosity and sacrifice on the part of so many people in this parish who made this all possible, we can appreciate the image of Jesus the Good Shepherd even more. The flock is protected within the sheepfold, and at the end of the day, all the sheep came into the sheepfold thru the gate. Once all the sheep were safely in the sheepfold, the Shepherd would lay down across the entrance and actually "be" the gate---the doorway. None of the sheep could get out or get lost because he was watching them; similarly, no enemy or wild animal could get in to attack the sheep because the shepherd was there to protect them. And in that sheepfold, the sky was their roof. Other than living in the outdoors, we know that "roofs" are a basic necessity; we all want/need to have a "roof over our heads" as one of the basic necessities of life. That's the same thing here for our parish home. When we come here, within these sacred walls and under this blessed roof, we are God's Holy People---we are the Church gathered in the Name of Jesus; we are gathered into the one Flock of Christ.

On this 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter, we also remember the World Day of Prayer for Vocations. Many of us here have already chosen our life vocations, either as a committed single person, living the state of marriage, or as an ordained person or a member of religious life. But there are many people here who are still discerning what their life vocation might be. As you do so, I

ask you to not just think about what you want to do, or what vocation you think you should pursue, but what vocation Jesus wants you to consider. And I ask you in a particular way to consider the life of Priesthood, especially to serve the needs of the Church here in our Diocese. I ask all grandparents/parents/parishioners to pray and encourage your children to consider Priesthood and religious life. I ask all young men and women to pray, to seek Jesus' advice and direction, and the Guidance of the Holy Spirit as you think about your life vocation.

But, all of us share in the basic vocation common to all of us who are baptized, and that is to be God's holy people, to live our lives in holiness, and to keep our eyes on our final destination, which is to live with God forever in Heaven. In order for us to reach that goal, we have to make sure that we are living our lives well here in this life.

How do we do that? By listening to Jesus' loving voice, by following Jesus through the "Saving Gate", who will lead us safely home where we will inherit our eternal salvation.

God bless you, now and always!