

042510 4th Sunday Of Easter

Well good morning... we can have three different titles or names for this Sunday.... Can any of you give me one of the three? They are: Good Shepherd Sunday.... the next is that today is the World Day of Prayer for Vocations.... and finally... today is First Communion Sunday.

Let's spend a few moments on each of these titles... First -- Good Shepherd Sunday. It is written.. and the gospel tells us the same thing... when Jesus speaks, He tells us, "my sheep know my voice." Now we have a dog Holly -- she's been with us for more than 11 years. Holly knows my voice -- and when I speak -- she listens and most often -- she does what I tell her to do. That's just like the shepherd -- when he calls all his sheep -- they know the voice of the master and they follow him. A couple points about this -- they hear.... and they follow. And Jesus gives us this image because we are called to be his sheep... it may not sound pleasing to you... but Jesus is saying that mine know me and I know mine... Jesus, like the shepherd protects us and gives us protection and life.

But for the sheep to be protected, for the sheep to be taken care of -- they have to follow the voice of their shepherd. So must we. Most people here would say, "Well, Jesus has never spoken to me... I never heard his voice." Well, the truth is - Jesus voice is heard in several ways. Jesus speaks to us through the Scriptures -- that's why we have Bible readings at every Mass. Jesus speaks to us through the Church... for example -- some of the most holy and brilliant teachings came out of Pope John Paul II.

And before John Paul were the words and documents that came out of the Vatican II Conference.

Another way that the Shepherd Jesus speaks to us is in the authoritative teachings by the Church. During the times when Jesus walked on the earth, we didn't have things like contraception, embryonic stem cell research, and subjects like that -- so Jesus left us the Church to help guide us and be His voice here on earth.

Jesus also speaks to us through the lives of the saints. And finally, our educated and properly formed conscience and good and holy people around us help us to recognize God speaking to us.

The Good Shepherd isn't Oprah... or Dr. Phil.... or the voice or way they act on television or in movies or at school for our young people here today. The Good Shepherd is holy and pure and his words will never lead you astray or lead you to mistakes or bad acts.

Okay - let's move on to the Worldwide Day of Prayer for Priests... I tell you -- there isn't a human gift of Christ more important... more needed than the gift of the priesthood. In my internet writings and columns... in the recorded programs that I do -- I often lift up our priests. I ask for prayers of thanksgiving for the priests who have been most helpful in our lives... and I ask for prayers for the most broken of priests. And I've seen both kinds.

Please let me briefly share something I've mentioned in sermons before.

The Madonna House Community was started by Catherine Doherty -- she was born into a well to do family in Russia and eventually came to the United States and Canada. She was a close friend of Dorothy Day -- and both women are now being studied by the Church for possible sainthood.

I've visited Madonna Houses many times... and what I'm about to tell you is most notable in their formation house headquarters up in Canada. There are a couple hundred lay members of the community along with several priests and a bishop. When it's meal time -- the people sit along the rectangular dining room tables -- and when the priest comes in -- everyone at his table stands to recognize the priest's unique role as Christ's presence on earth.... we all sit down when the priest is seated. But when food dishes are emptied and in need of refill from the kitchen -- it is the job of the priest... and only the priest to go fill the dishes. This is the real-world symbol of the job of priests -- to feed and nourish the people of God.

If you want a better, more vibrant church -- it's up to you. The way to help attain that goal is to pray for more vocations... No matter what your age, your life should be a prayer and an example so that you will help lead young men to consider the priesthood... There is a sort of tough-love saying that the people get the priests they deserve... and if you are often on your knees interceding with God for more and more priests -- God will not disappoint.

And finally -- let me say a few words about First Communion Sunday... we have these children (and others?) here today.

They are dressed especially nice... they have been prepared for today... there will probably be pictures after this Mass... and maybe even a special meal someplace.

This is a special season and a special weekend. Not only do we celebrate again and again that Jesus Christ is risen, but we celebrate that Jesus gives Himself to us as the Bread of Life. And these youngsters at this Mass, help us to remember and celebrate our own Communion and our own faith in the Eucharist. And I want to thank them for doing that. So the first thing I want to do is ask all our young people who are making their First Communion at this Mass, would you stand up so we can see you and so we can thank you? (Applause!) Now you can sit down, but I want you to stay wide awake because I need your help in my homily and in what I am going to say.

We know Jesus comes in many ways. Who can tell me how Jesus comes to us? Jesus comes to us in Baptism. Jesus comes when we gather, two or three in His name. Jesus comes to us in the Poor. Jesus comes to us in His word in the Bible. But the most unique way that Jesus is really present as a Person to us is in the Bread of Communion. Jesus chose to come like Bread.

(If we have children present: Have you ever seen one of those food pyramid charts that show you things you should eat? They include fruits and vegetables and grain products. One of the most common form of grain products is bread.)

Bread in one form or another has always been a staple of the diet of men and women. The word staple means something is a basic or necessary form of food. Isn't it interesting that Jesus gave us the gift of himself in the outward form of bread. Bread is a part of a good meal plan.

Do you know why we eat a good meal now and then, and try to have a good diet? So you'll grow up and be strong and you can do things.... When we gather like this for the Eucharist, we meet Jesus and His family. We are nourished by Jesus. When we receive Him worthily and with a right heart, we become more and more the Body of Jesus, a family caring for each other.

And last, we are sent to go out and change the world, to make a difference in our world. That's what we celebrate. That's what we wish for children. Every time we come to Mass, that's what we celebrate for ourselves, that we might be nourished by the person of Jesus, that we might become the Body of Jesus, and that we might make a difference in the world. Let us give thanks to the Lord Who is so good.