

HOMILY for May 3, 2020:

Today is Good Shepherd Sunday. This is an ancient, biblical image of Christ as the one who leads us, cares for us, and personally knows each of us. And it reminds us how much we know Him, recognize His voice, and want to recognize it more and more. Christ is the True Shepherd, and the Good Shepherd.

Today, at the end of the gospel passage, we get that last half of verse ten. “I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly.”

Our Lord came that we might have more life; abundant life. Jesus is the true shepherd and our Good Shepherd.

One commentator tells us that our Responsorial Psalm today, Psalm twenty-three, was one of the favorite passages to use to describe to new Christians the sacraments they received when they became Christian and received abundant life.

Those lessons can be summed up in a prayer in the Liturgy of the Hours after praying Psalm twenty-three. “Lord Jesus Christ, Shepherd of your Church, you give us new birth in the waters of Baptism; you anoint us with oil, and call us to salvation at your table. Dispel the terrors of death and the darkness of error. Lead your people along safe paths, that they may rest securely in you and live forever in your Father's house.”

To go over that a bit more slowly:

In the Psalm we pray, “beside restful waters he leads me” – in the waters of Baptism we are given new birth.

In the Psalm we pray, “you anoint my head with oil” - in Confirmation we are anointed with the Holy Spirit.

In the Psalm we pray, “You spread the table before me in the sight of my foes...my cup overflows” - In the Eucharist we are fed with the Bread of Life and the Cup of Eternal Salvation.

Abundant, overflowing life is given – from Christ, in Christ, through Christ. Christ who is the Good Shepherd, who came that we might have life and have it more abundantly.

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The main focus of the gospel is always – that Jesus is the shepherd. The real leader is Christ.

It is not “lead for the sake of leading,” any more than “it does not matter what you believe in, just believe in something.”

It matters what we believe. It matters who we entrust our faith. It makes a difference who let be our God. And it matters where we are being led.

Christ came because it matters in an eternal way. He alone is the Good Shepherd who gives life, and more abundantly. He is the true shepherd of the sheep. We are to know not just anyone, but Him. He is the one to have faith in. He is the true leader.

For leaders in the Church, this is the main point. It is not a battle for who gets to lead. Shepherding is about Christ.

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Every year this Sunday is also World Day of Prayer for Vocations. We all have a calling – a vocation by God – for which we need to pray and pray for others. This day focuses particularly as the time to pray for vocations to the priesthood and to the Consecrated Life (that is, to Religious Orders of Brothers or Sisters).

What can be said of all our vocations, we definitely need to say about such visible vocations. The ordained men and the men and women in religious orders need to know who their shepherd is. They need to be people who love Christ, who have experienced His abundant life. They need to desire it more. And they need to desire to share Christ’s abundant life with others.

They need to be people who know that leading – is leading people to the true Leader; the Good Shepherd. They need to be people who recognize His voice and follow Him. So that wherever they go, others can confidently follow.

I ask all of you to daily pray for vocations today.

I ask all the young to pray for your vocation, your calling. Think of the ways Christ has been there for you – giving you abundant life. Remember His voice, which calls

you by name. Listen for that voice. Ask that Jesus give you the ability to follow Him always.

Young men and women, ask Jesus if He wants you to follow Him as a Religious Brother or Sister.

Boys and young men, ask Jesus if He wants to you follow Him as a deacon or priests.

And I beg your indulgence – especially as a priest. During this time of Stay-at-home directives from the state, so many people are rediscovering their hunger for the Sacraments. Christ needs priests so that the Abundant Life He gives in His Sacraments is available to His people.

We need priests today.

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Christ gives abundant life. I end with a quote from a Scripture Scholar, John Bergsma, who said it so well.

“Too often we live the Christian life in a constrained way, thinking perhaps that the moral law of God puts “limits” on our lifestyle. This is an incorrect way of thinking. In reality, sin constrains our lifestyle and leads to enslavement (addiction) to various behaviors or pleasures that result in both physical and spiritual death. The life that Jesus offers us is infused with meaning, with joy, with love, and with the divine presence. It’s a kind of living by comparison with which anything else seems rather a kind of death than a kind of life.”

“True life begins with Jesus. A life of dissipation and capitulation to our physical desires is actually a kind of living death. Maybe that’s why zombie movies are so popular these days: folks actually feel like zombies, living an empty “life” though they are spiritually dead. Let’s pray that during this Easter Season we would understand the better that the life of sin is no life at all, and that the life in Christ is the beginning even now of eternal life.”