

Fourth Sunday of Easter May 15, 2011

Readings: Acts 2:14a, 36-41; 1 Peter 2:20b-25; John 10:1-10

Promoting Vocations

Almost 40 years ago, a few years after we were married, Jenni and I went to Cedar Point one nice summer day. Today Cedar Point is all about roller coasters, but back then it had a broader diversity of family-oriented activities. It was not built up from one end to the other with rides. One could walk along the Frontier Trail that passed by shops with artisans demonstrating their different crafts. That day, as we were walking along that route, I realized that Jenni was no longer by my side. I turned around to find that she was mesmerized by a lady spinning yarn at a spinning wheel on the front porch of her shop. Jenni was fascinated and declared that she was going to learn to spin one day. Well one thing led to another and before long we had three spinning wheels in the house. And then another thing led to another and I was building a small barn and fencing off part of our backyard to provide a home for two sheep that became her pets and the source of her wool.

Whenever Jenni was in the yard, the sheep would hear her voice and recognize her and would come running to the gate. It is a memory that comes to mind whenever I hear today's gospel passage. Lan-o-lyn and Radar knew that she was their shepherd; the one who brought them food and water and took care of their needs, who gave them attention and love. She was a good shepherd.

But Jesus is *the* Good Shepherd who laid down His life for us, His sheep. Jesus loves us and provides what we need. Jesus says about the true shepherd: "***The gatekeeper opens [the gate] for him, and the sheep hear his voice, as the shepherd calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has driven out all his own, he walks ahead of them, and the sheep follow him, because they recognize his voice.***" Jesus is our Good Shepherd, but sometimes we don't follow Him. Is it because we don't recognize His voice? Is it because we don't spend the time in prayer to get to know Him better? Why don't we act like Lan-o-lyn and Radar and meet Him at the gate?

Jesus speaks to us directly through prayer. He sends His Spirit to give us wisdom and guidance to help us follow the straight path through life; the path that leads to eternal life in heaven. Jesus is our Shepherd, but it is important to remember that He became one of us. He was at the same time Shepherd and the unblemished Lamb, the sheep led to the slaughter. And Jesus calls some from His flock to also be sheep and shepherd at the same time.

He left us His Church to provide shepherds to stand in for Him and be a physical presence to help us lest we go astray. God calls men from the flock to become priests and bishops and speaks through them to help guide us with voices we can hear and recognize with our physical ears. But we need more holy shepherds. We need more clear voices leading us to the truth.

And so Pope Benedict XVI has declared this Sunday to be the 48th World Day of Prayer for Vocations. He asks us to reflect on the theme: "*Proposing Vocations in the Local Church*".

God calls us all to different vocations. It may be our state in life, whether that be to the married or single life. It may be the basis for directing our career as a means of serving God rather than just looking for a job to earn money to serve ourselves. But in the context of today's prayer for vocations, we focus on God's call to individuals to serve in the Church in the

ministerial priesthood and in the consecrated life. And to these vocations, God calls men and women of all ages. But again, are they able to recognize His voice when He calls. Are there too many distractions? Is there too much interference by those who try to discourage these vocations because they don't coincide with the values of the world?

And so our prayer is needed to help overcome these obstacles. We pray for ourselves in case we are being called and we pray for others in our families and in our local communities. The pope wrote: ***“Vocations to the ministerial priesthood and to the consecrated life are first and foremost the fruit of constant contact with the living God and insistent prayer lifted up to the ‘Lord of the harvest’, whether in parish communities, in Christian families or in groups specifically devoted to prayer for vocations.”*** Are you in constant contact with the living God through frequent participation in the sacraments so you can be ready to hear what God wants you to do? Do you participate in insistent prayer lifted up to the “Lord of the harvest”?

We should pray every day to maintain that constant contact with the Good Shepherd so we can hear and recognize His voice leading us, and for some He will lead them to a religious vocation. And today we pray in a special insistent way that those that God is calling will hear and respond to Jesus' simple call heard throughout the gospels: ***“Follow me.”*** But, while the pope calls us to prayer, he also calls us to action as he states: ***“Particularly in these times, when the voice of the Lord seems to be drowned out by ‘other voices’ and his invitation to follow him by the gift of one’s own life may seem too difficult, every Christian community, every member of the Church, needs consciously to feel responsibility for promoting vocations. It is important to encourage and support those who show clear signs of a call to priestly life and religious consecration, and to enable them to feel the warmth of the whole community as they respond ‘yes’ to God and the Church.”***

It is the responsibility of each of us to do our part in promoting vocations. It is up to us to invite, encourage, and support young men and women who indicate signs of being called, especially those in our own families. Look around this church today. Are there future priests and nuns in our midst? Maybe future deacons? Who do you think God is calling? Will you invite them and encourage them to help them hear and answer the call?

Deacon Joe Hulway