

## EASTER 4 – YEAR B

In the name of the Father +, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

This morning's Gospel reading is, as is always the case on the fourth Sunday of Easter, about the Good Shepherd. This Gospel has often been understood to be about Jesus addressing primarily the leaders of his Church: the bishops, priests and deacons. It's a Gospel that sometimes makes it look like Jesus is only concentrating on the leaders or 'shepherds' of the Church, and it seems to let everyone else off the hook. Not so! Each one of us is called to a different ministry and function within the Body of Christ through the baptism we share, though the ministry and function we are called to individually is obviously different.

Each one of us is on a different stage in our Christian pilgrimage; each one of us experiences in an entirely individual way God's call to service, and we are each asked to respond to that call in a unique and individual way.

Before I go on to talk about our vocation to service as the whole people of God, I want to spend a few minutes telling you about my own journey and how I have come to be where I am now.

I began to feel a vocation to the Priesthood after I'd been confirmed when I was fourteen. I knew that there was nothing I could do about this feeling for several years, so I carried on with my studies hoping that this feeling would go away as time went on. When I applied to university, I applied to study Law and won the organ scholarship to S. John's College, Oxford. However, I was extremely disappointed when I received my "A" Level results, as I'd dropped a grade, and did not take up the place. This was a great disappointment to me as I'd set all my hopes upon this course, and they'd seemed cruelly dashed, as I believed that the way I was going was God's will. This was very testing, and caused me to doubt a great deal. I prayed about this, and found myself taking a place to study Chemistry, which was my favourite "A" Level at UCL. When I moved to London I found a church, Holy Cross in S. Pancras, where I found my spirituality and vocation developing, and I began again to sense that small voice within me calling me to serve God as a Priest once again. I didn't at that point sense that there was going to be another change in direction around the corner! After my second year at UCL, I decided that this call to the Priesthood couldn't be ignored: I felt that if I didn't grasp the bull by the horns, I never would, least of all because it would give me peace of mind whatever

happened. So, I abandoned my chemistry degree in favour of theology.

When I was in the second year of my theology degree I went to a Selection

Conference and was selected for ordained ministry, and went to S.

Stephen's House in Oxford two and a half years ago. Half way through my

training, I met with my Bishop who pointed me in the direction of S. Paul's,

where I accepted the offer to be the Curate here. And, after nearly two

years in diaconal and priestly ministry, I wouldn't be anywhere else.

My journey to where I am currently has been a rather round-about one, I'm

sure you'll agree. It has made me question, doubt, curse and quarrel, but it

is only with hindsight that I can look back and see God's hand always

guiding me, though at the time I was unable to see the way forward, and

believed that I was blundering through the darkness alone. When thinking

about my own vocation I am always reminded of a verse of Scripture that

my mother taught me while I was very young: "The Lord is my Shepherd" –

the opening verse of the familiar Psalm 23. No matter what I have gone

through in my life, whether I walk through the valley of the shadow of

death and despair I can always be sure that God is walking through it with

me; whether I doubt, whether I curse, whether I loose my way, I know that

God is always beside me to be my help and my strength. What makes me

so sure of this, you may ask? I am sure because Jesus Christ, God's own beloved Son, has said that He is the Good Shepherd, as we heard in today's Gospel reading. I am sure that He who called Peter and Andrew, James and John from their nets on the Sea of Galilee to follow Him and to spread His gospel throughout all nations, still calls men and women to a variety of service within His Church. I am sure that He who is the Good Shepherd, who knows His sheep so intimately that words cannot express, who lays down even His own life that His sheep may have life in all its fullness, will never forsake His own, and will always guide and guard them, though they stray from the Way, and will bear us gently back into His fold.

I am sure that God is calling each of us to a particular service within His Church. Just as S. Paul teaches us, the body has many organs with different functions, so does the Church have varieties of service. Each one of us is unique and is valued by God who loves us and has created us to fulfil a particular role in the mission of the Church. Whether we be a bishop, a priest, a monk or nun, a pastoral assistant, a Sunday School teacher, a member of the PCC, or someone who arranges the flowers, reads from the Bible or serves the coffee after Mass – all of us are called to use the talents that God has given us to fulfil the service that He is calling us to. And that is

the stewardship of our Christian lives that God is calling us to fulfil in his service: to use our minds, our bodies, our lives for the glory of his name and the advancement of his kingdom.

So today, I ask you to search your heart, through prayer, reading of the Scriptures and participation in the Sacraments; I ask you to seek God's will for your life and for the part He wants you to play within the service of His Church. Now is the time to think about these things: don't put them off. In our world of change, uncertainty and indifference to Christianity and the Gospel, the Church needs now – more than ever before - faithful men and women to respond to God's call to serve His Church in all the fullness of her ministry. If you believe you have a vocation to serve God in any way, speak to myself or Fr Mark: do not delay. The Church desperately needs you, for the harvest is so rich and the labourers are so few. If you are a man who believes you have a vocation to priesthood, speak to us. The Church needs priests, for which I encourage you today to pray.

And whatever you discern, by the Holy Spirit's power, your vocation to be, whether to lay or ordained ministry, be sure of this: that whatever service God is calling you to, He will also give you the grace and power of His Holy Spirit to fulfil it. He who is the Good Shepherd will never forsake His sheep:

He will walk with us, He will guide us, He will bring us back if we lose our way. He who calls us to take up our cross and follow Him, will help us to shoulder it all the way we are asked to go. I pray that you and I will all find the fullness of life and joy in our vocation and ministry that Jesus so longs for us: that our joy and service may bring others into His fold, who for our sakes and for the salvation of all the world laid down His life and rose again, as He said He would.

Amen.