

Today is World Day of Prayer for Vocations, a day that Christians are invited to reflect on the meaning of God's call and to pray for vocations. To help us reflect on the meaning of the priestly vocation, the church presents to us in today's gospel the figure of Jesus the Good Shepherd. Last Sunday we saw Our Lord three times giving Peter the charge to "feed my sheep." In that way he made Peter a shepherd, a pastor. Our Lord continued his work of shepherding his people through Peter and his co-workers: the apostles and disciples, and through their successors: the Pope, the bishops, priests, deacons, religious, catechists, and committed lay people.

This weekend we continue to celebrate the victory won for us by Jesus Christ. The readings this weekend provides an opportunity for deeper reflection on the significance of our belief in the resurrection. In particular, it provides the chance to examine concrete ways that our belief in the Resurrection can challenge and influence our lives.

Being people of the Resurrection makes us different. We are empowered by Christ's victory over sin and death to embrace hope. What others may see as endings, we see as beginnings. What was once steeped in despair now has new life and direction. When we may be confronted with a wall, God provides a door. No one can take us from His saving hand.

Being people of the Resurrection has the ability to change our entire take on life and vision of our world. Life tests our faith just like it tested Paul and Barnabas. Even for the most faith filled person, trying to navigate through everyday life events and decisions can be a challenge. Life can easily lead us into darkness. It can sadden and quickly disappoint even the strongest and most content of people.

There is a lot of wisdom and peace to be found when we develop a mature and meaningful spiritual life and walk in the confidence of our faith. It is when we become middle-of-the-road and weak in our trust in God that doubt, despair, anxiety, and fear creep in. If we allow them to stay around too long, depression is sure to follow taking us away from the hope to which we are called.

The Resurrection asks us to develop a new outlook toward life and to make choices that are different than those who have no hope! We are to shake the dust from our old ways and move on. We must continually be urged and reminded “to remain faithful to the grace of God” even in the midst of great trial and difficulty! We live in a very troubled and anxious world. Enormous concerns present themselves to us daily, easily leading us deeper into fear, anxiety, and worry.

These concerns may be political, economic, religious, social, and even personal. They affect how we get our kids to school, where they play, and with whom they interact. They affect how we view our jobs, our possessions, our livelihood, and our dreams. We even begin to let little things bother us. We say and do things to hurt others and don't even realize we are doing it. Our world begins to unravel and it becomes unstable. As people of the Resurrection we have something to bring to an unstable world.

The world in which the early Christians lived was even more frightening. For them, their faith had a great price tag upon it and came with a risk. Namely, they paid the price of their lives. Yet, in the midst of the instability, fear, persecution, and death they never gave up. They had to sacrifice their worldly dreams and desires, they had to say goodbye to family and friends, and they had to sacrifice all that they had acquired because they believed. They did not allow persecution and ridicule to make them wonder if God had abandoned them. They had hope. They persevered because they knew that what Jesus accomplished was true!

Our faith can speak to the anxiety we have about our world. If it is mature and developed enough it can bring us courage! Nobody is asking for our lives, yet we allow the hostility in our world to bring us down! We allow things to unsettle our hearts. We become weak. The ultimate question is this: do we truly believe that Jesus died and rose from the dead?

This is the question we must answer. If the daily events of our lives trouble us so much that they bring us into doubt or despair and force us to question the spirit of God, then the answer is less than yes!

We cannot become so narrow-minded in our vision that the events and concerns of this world be all that we see. We are destined to continue! It is human to want to hold on to that which is familiar and immediate. We fear change. We doubt our ability to cope. We worry about whether we can do it or find meaning again when things change permanently. But we can! We too can be counted among the ones who have survived the time of great distress.

If we can wake up each morning with hope, love, and peace in our hearts, what else really matters? When we see things through the eyes that the Resurrection provides, the amount we lost in our retirement fund is less important. We worry less about our job security and more about the relationships in our lives that benefit from our work. We don't allow hurtful remarks consume our day and take away from what really matters. The Resurrection teaches us to use our time wisely. It begs us to focus on things that are eternal rather than worldly.

We are called to tend to the people in our lives more than the things we hold so dear. At the end of the day, it is not the things that we have that provide happiness. Happiness is found in the heart where the love of others has left a mark. This is our treasure; this is where God is found. It cannot be taken away; even by death. It is a gift freely given by the One who paid the price of his life so that we can live.

All we are asked to do is nothing other than to receive the gift. This is the time to stand tall. This is the time to pursue our dreams. These are not dreams of earthly success but eternal dreams. Choosing faith and choosing God always brings us to a better place. Anxiety and worry only distract. Fear is crippling. God wants us to be free. We need to let go and trust in order to get there.

We are not unlike the early church today; real tensions existed in the early church around membership issues. How could two very different groups of people (Jews and Gentiles) come to share a similar faith in Jesus Christ? The early church survived, because they kept the focus less on their differences and more on their similarities: a shared faith in Jesus, the Good Shepherd of whom we are his people, the sheep of his flock.

This week if you become discouraged, stop for a minute and listen for His voice and follow Him.