

OUR LADY STAR OF THE SEA, MUMBLES
Reflection for
Fourth Sunday of Eastertide Year A, 3 May 2020
(May be used for Home Prayer Service)
Dominican Friars, Swansea

This reflection may be used during the home prayer service. Please see the home prayer service sheet for details.

CHRIST SHEPHERDS HIS FLOCK THROUGH THE CHURCH

In communicating to his followers who were mainly Jews, Jesus used imageries that were generally intelligible to them. One of these was that of a shepherd. Through the imagery of a shepherd, Jesus tells us about himself and about his mission in the world and in his Church. The Church is a sheepfold whose one and indispensable door is Christ. Baptised Christians are the sheep.

Although the sheep are ruled by human shepherds, they are nevertheless continuously led and nourished by Christ Himself, the Good Shepherd (Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*, n. 6). Today is the Good Shepherd Sunday. However, the Church also directs our minds to the various forms of vocations through which we respond to Christ the Good Shepherd. In Christ's sheepfold, we have vocations to the married life, the ordained ministry, religious life and the single state.

Jesus the Good shepherd has authority over his sheep: The good shepherd enters through the door of the sheepfold because the sheep belong to him. The authority which Christ exercises over his Church is that which he received from the Father (cf. Mt 28:18). Christ exercises this authority through the ministry of his Church, headed by the Pope, the Vicar of Christ on earth (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 18). The authority which the Pope exercises over the Church is that which he received from Christ.

Through the Church and in the Church, Christ nourishes his sheep at the Eucharist. Psalm 23:5 responds to this love of Christ in saying that the good shepherd prepares a banquet for his sheep. This banquet is the Eucharist where Christ feeds us and leads us to our eternal home with him.

He knows his sheep and they listen to him: Ps 139 speaks beautifully of how much God knows his sheep and how we cannot escape the grasp

of his knowledge. He knows us because he created us, and he guides the path of our lives. For this reason, we need not fear because he will not allow evil to befall us. With the assurance that God knows us, he requests that we listen to him speak to us in the Scriptures. Through this life-giving word as through the Eucharist, he leads us to our eternal home with him.

As God speaks to us, we respond to him in loving obedience as he calls us to serve one another. As we celebrate Vocations Sunday today, we join the universal Church in praying for vocations to the priesthood and religious life. We also pray that those who are seeking life partners may find one that will help them to find peace in life.

Jesus calls us by our names: To be called by one's name indicates some level of friendship and love. Jesus calls us by our names because he loves us. He has also built a personal friendship with each of us so that we can feel the depth of his love. We remember how Christ called Mary Magdalene by name in the moment of her distress. It was at that point that her eyes were opened, and she recognised the Master (cf. Jn 20:16). In our moment of despair, Jesus the Good Shepherd calls us by our names to reassure us that he is our shepherd and that we shall not lack any good thing (Ps 23:1).

Jesus is the door of his Church: As one accesses a building through the door, so do we become members of the Church, the sheepfold, through baptism into Christ. Baptism then becomes the product of apostolic preaching through which the message of Christ reaches the ends of the earth. This is evident in our First Reading (Acts 2:38-39).

As we have come to know Christ the good shepherd, our mission is then to invite others to this sheepfold. In this sheepfold, Christ unites us as we call on him to gather us in our churches, the physical sheepfold, once again.