

EGO SUM BONUS PASTOR

*A Homily for the Fourth Sunday of Easter (B)
St. Paul's Parish, Gävle, Sweden.*

Texts: Acts 4:8-12; Ps.117; 1Jn 3:1-2; John 10:11-18

“I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd is one who lays down his life for the sheep”. My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, these words of our Lord, which we have just heard are very consoling. We who live in this troubled world need to be reassured again and again that we are not without hope. God loves us so much that He would not want us to be like sheep without a shepherd. In the past, when the human leaders of Israel failed in their vocation to take care of the people the Lord put in their charge he expressed his displeasure and promised to take care of the people by himself, **“ I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out...”** (Ez. 34:11). This promise of God was fulfilled when at the appointed time God the Son became a man and lived among us (Cf. Jn. 1:14). **He the “Son of man came to seek out and save what was lost”** (Luke 19: 10). We understand the message of the Lord more clearly now that we are celebrating the mystery of our salvation at Eastertide. By dying on the Cross for us, the Lord Jesus has shown us that he is indeed the Good Shepherd, who laid down his life for the flock and took it up again for their justification. In him the loving kindness of our God has come down to us in its fullness. By his death and resurrection, Jesus has truly gathered together the scattered children of God. This saving act is not something that happened only in the past. It is an event that is on going. As I speak to you, Jesus Christ is still the Good Shepherd, the universal Pastor of his Church, just as he has been. He is with us, directing our lives and our actions as the members of his flock, the Church. And he wants every human being in the world to be saved, that is, to be a member of his one flock, the Church, of which he is the one Shepherd. His power to save is not limited to those who are members of the Church. He is the Saviour of the entire human race and indeed the entire creation. His work of salvation is not limited to those who have faith in him and follow his ways. He is longing for the souls of all the human beings he created, the same people for whom he gave his life and rose from the dead.

From the beginning, he chose the apostles to share in his office as shepherds. He chose them so that he will continue his saving work through them. *This is also in keeping with the promise of God to our ancestors in the faith through the Prophet Jeremiah to raise good shepherds to pasture the flock, the new Israel, which is the Church of Christ* (Cf. Jere. 23:16). When the apostles had experienced the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, they went out full of power and conviction to be shepherds over the people of God. By calling on the name of the Risen Christ, they healed the sick, they converted those who had strayed from the Lord and they preached the Gospel in season and out of season, welcome or unwelcome. They were prepared even to give their own lives. In the First Reading of today, we hear the Apostle Peter as he testifies before the authorities in the name of the Risen Lord Jesus Christ. He tells them in clear terms that Jesus Christ is the only Saviour and hope of humanity: **“For all the names in the world given to men, this is the only one by which we can be saved”** (Acts 4: 12).

By our baptism, we all share in the power of the Risen Christ. We all have received the Holy Spirit and we all have been called and commissioned to proclaim Christ, welcome or

unwelcome. Each member of the Church is to carry out this command according to the charisma that the Lord has given him/her. The pope as the successor of Peter has the responsibility to lead the Church and at all times to act as the Vicar of Christ the Good Shepherd. The bishops, as successors of the apostles have the responsibility to serve the people of God in their dioceses and together with the pope to serve the entire Church. The priests, who are co-workers with the bishops, are to be good shepherds over the flock of Christ in their care.

But all these servants of the Church are first of all members of the Church who come from various families. This underlines the importance of family life. It has been said many times that the family is the nucleus Church. It is in the family that children learn their first lessons on the faith from their parents. In this diocese, information on vocation to the priesthood is published very often. Special prayers for vocation to the priesthood are offered regularly. These are commendable and should be encouraged. It is also commendable that the importance of family is emphasised again and again. This is because the family is the seed bed of vocations. So, the message of today goes also to parents as the first teachers and “shepherds” of the members of their families. I have said it before. And it is necessary that I say it again: vocation to the priesthood is nurtured in the family. If we desire to have many good priests, we should pay attention to Christian families. It is a truism that where we have healthy and happy Catholic families we also have many young people who are responsive to the call by the Lord of the harvest to serve as priests. Through their love for each other, their strong faith, their regular prayer life, their acts of charity and their love for the Church, parents nurture their children and present them to the Good Shepherd for him to do with them what he wills. If he decides to call them to serve him as priests and religious, to him be the glory. I am a priest because my parents and my elder brothers and sisters loved me so much and taught me to love Christ and his Church. My family prepared me to be able to hear God’s call.

It is also very important that we should love Christ in the people he has given us as our shepherds. Young men are often inspired by the lives of priests. This inspiration prepares them to listen to the Lord who alone calls people to be priests. This is why we need holy and dedicated priests. For priests to be holy and dedicated, they need the support of the Christian community. A sad priest can hardly be an inspiration to any young man. A Catholic priest is not a man employed to work in the Church, like an administrator in a public office. Rather, he is a man, called and sanctified – a man configured to Christ – through whom Christ the Good Shepherd ministers to his people. For this reason, he deserves our respect, our support, our love and our daily prayers.

Loving Shepherd of Thy Sheep

Renew in us all the power of your resurrection

Give us the grace to serve you responsibly in the Church and in the world.

Be with all the leaders of your Church and

renew in our time the love of family, the nursery of vocations.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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Gävle, Sweden,

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