JMJ

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER – B – 2021

This is sometimes called Good Shepherd Sunday, because in the Gospel Jesus calls Himself the Good Shepherd. It’s the Sunday on which priests and deacons are encouraged to talk about vocations, especially vocations to ordained ministry and Religious life. I’m going to take that suggestion and expand it to include *all* vocations; including, then, the vocation to holy matrimony and the vocation to blessed singleness. Each of these states of life is a thing that God may call a person to; and the world doesn’t really understand any of them – including marriage.

It thinks of marriage as something purely natural. It thinks of those who never marry as unfortunate, and of the celibacy of priests and the vow of chastity as distinctly odd. It thinks all these things because it doesn’t understand the vocation of a Christian, or accept that the life-style choices of human beings should have anything much to do with God.

If the world thinks of God (or even believes in God), it thinks of Him as the maker of a giant clock called the universe. He got it going a long, long time ago, and He glances at it from time to time and may tweak it now and then; but by and large, what happens in it just happens. He gave us brains; and, within a certain range of allowed behaviors, He lets us figure things out for ourselves and go the way we choose.

That’s not the Christian understanding of vocation. For the serious Christian, life is less like a clock and more like a dance, with God wanting to dance with each and every one of us, helping us to navigate all the choices we have to make; including, and perhaps especially, the choice of a state in life – a vocation.

It takes two to tango, they say; but I like to think of it as something a little sweeter, like a waltz. In any case, it’s a dance. There’s a certain pattern to it, and there’s always someone who leads and someone who follows.

Ideally, the one who leads is God; and we’re supposed to take His lead and follow. But sometimes we don’t, and then we step on a few toes – mostly our own. But God doesn’t let go of us. He’s a masterful dancer and can set us right again, if we’re sensitive to His leading.

There are times in life when it seems that God allows us to take the lead, times when major decisions have to be made and God doesn’t seem to be leading us anywhere. It’s then, perhaps, that He allows us to do the best we can from the dance lessons that He’s already taught us. But it isn’t as though He lets go of us. He never will. And pretty soon He begins to take the lead again; and if we’re smart, we follow.

God has called me and Father Archie and our deacons to ordained ministry. Others He’ll call to either Religious life or blessed singleness. Most of you He’s called or will call to holy matrimony, which is no easy thing in this world. To whatever He calls you, follow His lead. And we can’t go wrong in doing that if we try very hard to follow the one vocation that He’s given to all of us. And that’s the vocation to holiness.

You may remember hearing me talk about a book called *Abandonment to Divine Providence.* The author of that book, Father Jean-Pierre de Caussade, said this about holiness; that it consists in one thing only, complete loyalty to the will of God.

That loyalty can be practiced in two ways, he said: actively and passively.

Active loyalty means to keep the commandments of God and the precepts of the Church, to be faithful to the duties of one’s state in life, and to be open to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. This active loyalty, he says, is easy; because God never demands anything that He doesn’t give us the help we need to do it.

And passive loyalty, he says, is even easier. It means to accept with love and resignation whatever God permits to happen to us. It’s easier, he said, because “it implies only that we accept what very often we cannot avoid, and endure with love and resignation things which otherwise could cause us weariness and disgust.”

This loyalty to the will of God, in big decisions and in small ones, leads to sanctity, and therefore to Heaven.

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“I am the good shepherd,” says the Lord; “I know my sheep, and mine know me.” He knows us and He loves us. As to the subject of vocation, the twenty-third psalm is a prayer that all of us can say: “The Lord is my shepherd. There is nothing I shall want. . . . *He leads me* . . . .”

He leads us. Follow Him!