

**Deacon Kerry Blandford's Homily, Saint Matthew Catholic Church, Indianapolis  
Fourth Sunday of Easter, April 21/22, 2018, Cycle B**

Today we celebrate Good Shepherd Sunday and the World Day of Prayer for Vocations. Together those two themes brought to mind a story shared with me by a priest I worked with years ago in Catholic Scouting.

After his ordination he returned to Rome for additional studies, and, because of his Scouting background, he found himself serving as the Scoutmaster of a troop of American boys living in Rome. Well, he had taken the troop on an outing, and they had set up their campsite in the middle of a large grassy field. The next morning they woke up to the bleating and baaing of sheep. Peering out from their tents, they discovered that they were in the middle of an enormous flock and could barely get out. And, these weren't fluffy, little sheep with "fleece as white as snow". These were muddy, smelly animals that were pushing tents over as they grazed.

Now, our Scoutmaster spotted the shepherd at the edge of the flock, and headed that way. Since he was in Italy, he assumed the shepherd would be Catholic and decided that introducing himself as "Father So and so" might be a good place to start in persuading the shepherd to move his flock.

Well, the shepherd's response was to say, "Father, as a priest you understand how important it is to care for your flock. My sheep need to graze." To this our Scoutmaster's reply was, "Yes, but, we were here first."

The shepherd in turn responded, “Father, as a man of the Church, you understand the importance of tradition. My family has pastured sheep here for over 200 years. So, you see, we were here first. -- But, we must both care for our flocks; so perhaps we can work something out.” At that our priestly Scoutmaster took the hint and paid the shepherd to move his flock over the next hill.

OK, although the shepherd our Scoutmaster encountered was a bit of a scoundrel, we know that being a shepherd requires hard work and sacrifice, and, in the end a true shepherd really does it out of love for his flock. That describes Jesus’ love for us doesn’t it?

It’s the Easter season and even with the smell of Easter flowers still in the air and with alleluias on our lips, we can’t forget the wood of the Cross. We can’t forget how our Good Shepherd laid down his life for us. And we know that He didn’t do it because we have “fleece as white as snow.” Let’s be honest. In our own way, we can be as muddy and unclean as those sheep in that field in Italy. We aren’t always beautiful. But, we are blessed that our Good Shepherd loves us anyway.

And, He calls on us to love one another in the same way. That’s our challenge. Throughout our Easter celebration, and beyond, we are all challenged to imitate our Good Shepherd’s self-sacrificing love. It’s hard to miss the example that Jesus gives us. In our Gospel reading today Jesus declared five times in eight

lines, “I lay down my life for my sheep.” And, if we are going to meet that challenge, we must be willing to be more than sheep. We must also be shepherds—good shepherds to each other and good shepherds of our faith.

We need to protect each other from the wolves. We need to care for those in need, lead back those who are lost, comfort those who are afraid, and, yes, even love those who are not always so lovable. That’s what a good shepherd does. That’s what Jesus has done for us. That’s what we’re called to do for each other.

The Fourth Sunday of Easter always portrays Jesus as our Good Shepherd, and so it’s only right that today we pray for priestly vocations, for shepherds after Jesus’ own heart. Is someone here today or someone we know who is being called as a priest, a deacon, or a religious? Think about it. Pray about it. Let’s carry that question with us as we continue our celebration of the Eucharist today.

As we celebrate Good Shepherd Sunday let’s pray for all vocations and the vocation each of us has as a Catholic Christian, as a person of faith. Let’s reflect on what our Good Shepherd, Jesus, has shown us, and taught us, and the example he has given us. How can we follow His example? How can we be people of compassion, people of conviction, people of mercy, people of sacrifice, people of love? How are we being called to lay down our lives for one another?