

Homily, 29 April 2012
Fourth Sunday of Easter

Acts 4:8-12; PsALM 118:1,8-9,21-23,26,28,29; 1 John 3:1-2; John 10:11-18

Jesus said: "I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."
World Day of Prayer for Vocations April 29, 2012



Jesus said: *"I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."*

Jesus died for us, that we might have eternal life. We all know that. But sometimes I wonder if we don't pass over that too quickly. Jesus didn't just lay down his life for us on Good Friday, but long before.

The Christian life is lived in imitation of Christ. How do we, as disciples of Christ, lay down our lives for others?



Imagine a young man, in his mid twenties. He is an only child. He is still a bachelor. He has few obligations. He is free.

Now he is planning an extended trip overseas with some good friends from college. It's a trip they have all been looking forward to for a long time.

Then, just a few weeks before his trip, he gets a phone call. His parents were in an automobile accident. His father was killed and his mother is seriously injured.

He rushes to the hospital and meets with the doctors. His mother will recover, but she will need months of rehabilitation, to say nothing of comfort and consoling. Sitting late that night at his mother's bedside, he thinks of all the other things that will have to be put in order: arranging for his father's funeral, seeing to his father's estate, taking care of his folk's house, getting bills paid.

At that moment, he lost his freedom.

The next morning he called his friends and told them he wouldn't be going on the trip.

Perhaps there might have been something else he could have done, made other arrangements, but his love for his parents overrode all those possibilities.

He laid down his life for his parents, especially for his mom. Deep in his heart, he knew that had he done anything else, he would have denied his very humanity.



If we love someone, we are never quite free, and the more we love the more we give up our freedom.

When Jesus descended into the waters of the Jordan River to be baptized by John, his public ministry began. From that point on he lived completely for us, *out of love for us* -- and for his Father. He laid down his life for our sake. His death on the cross would simply bring fulfillment and finality to what had already begun.

Most of us follow Jesus in our ordinary lives: giving witness to the Gospel through service to others in our homes, at work, and in our communities.

But there are some among us who hear a special call, a vocation to imitate Christ more closely. To surrender their lives to Christ, in service to the Church, out of love for God and neighbor.

I am thinking particularly of the men who hear call to the priesthood, and everyone, -- both men and women -- called to the religious life: those who take vows of poverty, obedience, and chastity in an unmarried state.

Priests and Bishops, as well as Deacons, receive the sacrament of Holy Orders, which along with the sacrament of Marriage, are the two sacraments directed toward the salvation of others.

Viewed from a worldly perspective, these two sacraments involve a loss of freedom.

But it isn't a loss at all. It is an exchange: the giving up of freedom to receive the bonds of love.

For those who make the exchange, nothing is lost. In fact, so much is gained: friendship, joy, adventure, contentment, peace. Those who receive the Sacrament of Holy Orders, particularly the priestly ministries, make the most radical exchange.

What about those vowed to religious life? They don't receive the sacramental grace of Holy Orders, but they do live out the grace of their baptism and confirmation in a similar way. They too live a life directed toward the salvation of others, out of a profound love for Christ. Despite the challenges of such a life, they find the radical exchange of their lives for the life of Christ every bit as rewarding.

These priest and religious are ordinary men and women who are living extraordinary lives, although they might not state it that way. They certainly don't want us to put them on a pedestal. They are not superhuman. They have just been given a different way to love.

They have sacrificed the possibility of being the most important person in someone else's life -- as a spouse or parent of young children -- so that they can serve in love as many people as possible.

They celebrate mass, hear confessions, anoint the sick, teach, care the poor, provide spiritual direction, pray, and do so much more ... not for themselves, but for you and for me.



Today is *the World Day of Prayer for Vocations*.

So I ask you to today to pray for our priests, Father Dan and Father Walter, who serve us so well in this parish and for me and the other deacons who serve here: deacons Jay, Bill, Gary, and Don.

Pray for Dan MaGuire as well. He is finishing his third college year at Conception Seminary and for Samantha Bastian who will soon be entering the Discalced Carmelites in Valparaiso.

Finally, pray for those discerning vocations or for yourself if you sense that God is calling you to a special service in the Church.

In closing, I'd like to read a quote from Fr. Pedro Arrupe. It's not really a prayer for vocations, but a reflection on living a truly Christian life -- a kind of reflection on the nature of every Christian vocation:

"Nothing is more practical than finding God, that is, than falling in a love in a quite absolute, final way.

What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination will affect everything. It will decide what will get you out of bed in the mornings, what you will do with your evenings, how you spend your weekends, what you read, who you know, what breaks your heart, and what amazes you with joy and gratitude. Fall in love, stay in love, and it will decide everything."

-- Amen!