

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson
30th April 2023 - 4th Sunday of Easter - 'Good Shepherd Sunday'
Readings (Year A): 1st: Acts 2:14,36-41. 2nd: 1 Peter 2:20-25. **Gospel:** John 10:1-10

All four gospel writers use the metaphor of Jesus as shepherd.

God is also described as a shepherd in the Old Testament, most famously in today's psalm.

St John's use of this is nothing new.

What is new is John's description of the relationship between the shepherd and the individual sheep.

John is intent on explaining that the life and work of Jesus demonstrate God's love for every individual. In John this is expressed by Jesus in many different ways. One example is how Jesus the shepherd knows the name of each one of his sheep. Knowing someone by name indicates intimacy.

The Old Testament tells us how the name of Israel, the chosen nation, is imprinted on the palm of God's hand. (Is: 49:16) which reads 'See, I have branded (inscribed) you on the palms of my hands'

John goes much further: God in fact knows the name of each individual, not simply the whole nation, and has a personal love for each one of us. 'He has called you by your name, you are his.'

We, the Church, are the community of believers who follow the voice of the risen Lord. He is always speaking to us especially in his word: hence the importance of the Liturgy/Ministry of the Word at every sacrament, particularly at Mass, as last week's gospel of the road to Emmaus reminded us.

The late Pope Benedict said 'the Good Shepherd is the one we listen to and follow.'

We are living at a crossroads in the history of the Church.

Society in many traditional Christian countries is seriously tempted to forsake the inspiration of the gospel and scripture and take on secularistic ways of thinking, evaluating and being.

The voice of Christ the shepherd is muted by the incessant propaganda which calls souls away from his flock. The sacred dimension of life is not taken seriously.

Exaggerated claims, based on psychological surveys or polls on behaviour, are taken as the basis for moral guidelines. The authority of God is replaced by a spurious democracy which settles for the lowest common denominator of agreed morality.

These are the thieving voices which steal and kill and destroy members of the flock.

The threatened flock of Christ need to hear a loud call to the values of the gospel.

The flock of Jesus Christ will always need the leadership of people who make commitment to Christ and his gospel their professed way of life. In a very special way, priests are called to be the mediators who bring people to God and bring God to the people.

For me it is and has been a wonderful calling, first coming when I was 14 in 1959.

I have tried to do that all that the Lord asks through every wonderful parish of my ministry, which this year marks 55 years in ministry, and 25 of them as a Catholic Priest in the Plymouth Diocese.

The purpose of this day is to publicly fulfil the Lord's instruction to '***Pray the Lord of the harvest to send labourers into his harvest.***'

There is some good news as you will see from the leaflet (<https://priesthoodplymouth.co.uk/resources>), with our 2 Cornish seminarians on the front, and that two more are joining, giving us 5 in seminary, and another 6 men, including another from Cornwall who are currently discerning a possible vocation.

They provide a beacon of hope for the future.