



Edinburgh, 10 April 2016

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

On the fourth Sunday of Easter, the Church celebrates Good Shepherd Sunday – when she encourages all of us to pray for an increase in vocations to the priesthood. Providentially, I have the privilege this week of joining our seminarians in Rome at the Pontifical Scots College as they celebrate their 400th anniversary. His Holiness, Pope Francis, will meet with them to mark the occasion and I am sure their joy will be further deepened knowing that they are in your prayers.

One of the great models of priesthood, to whom I am sure our seminarians often turn for inspiration, is St John Mary Vianney - the patron saint of parish priests. He famously said that 'the priesthood is the love of the heart of Jesus'. In other words, to be a priest is to be called personally by the Lord to love as he loves, and to imitate his self-sacrificial love for his flock.

In today's Gospel, we gain an insight of the intensity of the Lord's love for his flock. We, his sheep, belong to him. He earnestly desires that not one of us should be lost, and that no one can ever steal us from him because we were given to him by the Father himself.

There is a kind of holy jealousy here. Our God is, after all, a jealous God who desires our singular love and affection, as he revealed to Moses in the First Commandment. Jesus' love for his flock, the Church, is, therefore, of the same divine origin: 'The Father and I are one'. And what does he desire for us in this intense, divine love? Simply this: eternal life.

There is a real sense in which this mystery of Christ's love for his flock is the very template of all priestly living and loving. The priest too is called to have a holy jealousy for the flock entrusted to his care. He is to burn with zeal for souls; to be vigilant that not one of the flock be lost; to preach the faith welcome or unwelcome and to dispense the holy sacraments of the Church, which are the normative means of salvation – of gaining eternal life.

So a call to the priesthood is a call to imitate the mystery of Christ's love in the world as 'other good shepherds'. Not because the individual himself is good, although that is obviously always desired, but because the Good Shepherd working in and through him by virtue of the sacrament of holy orders makes it possible. This is precisely what we see in the witness of St Paul and St Barnabas in our first reading who - in spite of persecution - are filled with joy and the Holy Spirit. This is what you see in the joyful service of our priests in our own Archdiocese.

Today, I make a renewed appeal to any young men who may be at Mass this weekend to consider seriously a vocation to the priesthood of Jesus Christ. Is the Lord calling you to be another 'good shepherd' after his own heart? Is there a quiet ache in your heart which knows, deep-down, that you'll never be satisfied with the love that this world has to offer but only with the living and loving of Christ the priest? If you do, but you feel unworthy and not holy enough, then good, you're not! None of us are! But it is something you should consider seriously in prayer nevertheless. Speak to your parish priest about it or the Vocations Director. Do not be afraid to come and see! I too can testify that it is a life that, in spite of any difficulties, is filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.

And may we all continue to pray for vocations to the priesthood. Not just generically but from our own archdiocese, our own parishes, our own homes, our own sons! Pray for them to be generous with the Lord in the process of discernment; and pray for our own seminarians who are in formation at this time, including Deacons Tony Lappin and Jamie McMorrin who will be ordained to the priesthood on 24 June this year in the Cathedral in Edinburgh. Let me encourage each of you thinking about the priesthood to come to the ordination, and to see for yourself the grace of God at work in the life of those who offer themselves to Christ in this joyful, selfless, wonderful way.

With every Easter Blessing, I am

Yours sincerely in Christ,

+ Leo Cushley

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Archbishop of St Andrews & Edinburgh

