

Good Shepherd Sunday Pastoral Letter 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate Good Shepherd Sunday and the World Day of Prayer for Vocations to the Priesthood and Consecrated Life.

When I am writing my Pastoral Letters to you I usually think of you in your parish communities at Sunday Mass, reflecting on my words after being nourished by the Word of God and preparing to welcome our Risen Lord in the Eucharist. I fondly imagine you sharing this Sacred Gathering with your families and friends and, of course, with your priests.

Sadly, today our Churches are closed and we draw comfort and strength only from our online Masses, from our personal prayer and from our invincible faith in the Risen Lord.

Pope Francis has encouraged us to see this new normal of 'lockdown' as a providential opportunity to re-examine the values we use to shape our everyday lives.

He believes God is showing us amid this Pandemic how our lives are held together by ordinary people like doctors, nurses and carers; supermarket employees, cleaners and delivery drivers; teachers, police officers, volunteers and the like. So often we take them for granted. They are not the celebrities and superstars of magazine headlines but, in these days, they are writing the decisive chapters of our times. In their selfless and heroic work, they are answering a call; a call to service and a call to self-sacrifice.

Pope Francis urges us to see something 'priestly' in the many 'calls to service' answered in this Pandemic. Just as Jesus the High Priest gave His life for others, so our fellow citizens are giving their lives for our sake.

On Good Shepherd Sunday 2020 my thoughts and prayers go also to our priests who are even now ministering in our parish communities as best they can. In these days most are still on call to our hospitals and care homes for the sick and the dying. All of them are making their way daily to bury our dead and console their grieving loved ones. Each of them is reaching out in new ways, whether online or in prayer or organising food distribution to the needy, to serve you their people and the Lord's little and lost sheep.

They, too, are 'ordinary people' called to an extraordinary service; called to 'give of themselves' daily as they respond to the challenge to serve both at the heart of our communities and on the margins. Be assured that they are praying for you and offering the Sacraments for your families. They are 'Good Shepherds' still in our local communities.

Thank God, even amid the Pandemic I had the joy of ordaining Joe McGill to the diaconate ahead of his priestly ordination next year, and I look forward to ordaining deacon Ryan Black in a few months' time as our newest priest. Both of these young men were willing to bring forward their ordination dates in order to serve you, our people, in these anxious times and it was a big encouragement to me. Please remember them in your prayers, as well as our other three seminarians making their way to priestly service in our diocese who have been displaced from their seminaries during these times but are doing well. Many of you had the joy of seeing them on the wonderful BBC Documentary, *Priest School*, two weeks ago.

I pray that the example of our priests and religious inspires other men and women to serve the Lord in the Priesthood, Diaconate and Consecrated Life.

Please join me in praying for them, and for many vocations for our diocese in the coming years to take on their mantle. These are times of worry and sacrifice for you and your families and I encourage you to offer these crosses for good and holy vocations to the priesthood and religious life. Your offerings will be powerful before the Lord.

Today I entrust you to the Lord, the Good Shepherd; and in this lovely month of May to the intercession of Our Blessed Lady of Paisley: She Who is Health of the Sick and the Bright Star that guides us through the stormy sea of life.

Please stay safe, look after each other and continue to respond the Lord's call to service during this time.

With all my prayers and blessings,

+ John