

Richard



Bishop of Arundel & Brighton

PASTORAL LETTER
for the 4th Sunday of Easter
3rd May 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today we celebrate the 4th Sunday of Easter. It is a Sunday that takes its name – Good Shepherd Sunday – from the Gospel at Mass and is designated as the World Day of Prayer for Vocations to Priesthood and Religious life.

Jesus' words about Himself as Good Shepherd challenge us in two ways, for the Shepherd is both servant and leader. Jesus is a shepherd who "goes ahead" and is followed by the sheep to recognise his voice to the extent that they will follow Him alone. The very reason for following the shepherd is that the sheep may find safety and nourishment and "life to the full." This fullness of life is given to them. The sheep are served by their shepherd. He will, when necessary, leave the ninety-nine to go after the one. He is a shepherd whose desire is that all are safe, that all are with Him. In the words of today's Psalm, the sheep want for nothing.

We are facing the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. The sufferings and sorrows of so many across the world are very great. While this is so often the case somewhere in the world, the present situation affects each and every one of us. Many speak of things being different in the future, of not returning to the old ways. We are part of a wider society that is reassessing priorities, thinking about what really matters, open to be different in the future.

In this moment, we as the Body of Christ have something to proclaim: Life to the Full that Jesus promises to those who listen to his voice. He desires this for all.

Every vocation in the life of the Church grows from the life of the Blessed Trinity, instilled in us in Baptism. All have a vocation. People are called to marriage and also to the single life.

Today, the Church throughout the world prays for vocations to Priesthood and Religious Life, with the model of service and leadership that we find in today's Gospel placed before us. The Lord's example calls for those who will keep nothing back in their service of their brothers and sisters, reaching out to everyone and calling all to unity with Him.

The call to Religious Life is a call to place Christ before all else, in fidelity, in prayer, in simplicity of life and in service. This is a model and example that proclaims life. It is a blessing for the Church and the world.

The call to Diaconate – and we are blessed in this Diocese by the presence of our many Deacons – is a call to Service of the Word and of Charity: The Word who is Life, the charity that is the service of Christ Himself to his flock.

The call to Priesthood is the call to share in the sacrificial priesthood of the One Who gave Himself for us. It is service and leadership, growing from the celebration of the Eucharist with and for the Church and the World. It is the preaching of the Good News through word and life.

Please pray for all those in formation and for those who accompany them.

As we look to the future of our Diocese and, indeed, of our whole society, these ways of life – for they are not jobs, but ways of life – will be vital in the Mission that has been entrusted to us. So, to those of you in our families and parishes considering priesthood, diaconate, religious life I say this: do not dismiss the possibility. Speak with others about it, explore the way of life to which you feel called, above all pray and be open to the call of the Good Shepherd. May you experience the prayer and support of your families and friends in your discernment and the encouragement of your parish communities.

Be open to the call to serve and lead as the Good Shepherd Himself serves and leads.

With every Blessing,

Yours sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard".

Bishop of Arundel & Brighton