

From the Deacon's Desk

Scripture Today:

In Today's Gospel, Jesus says: "My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me." Growing up in Detroit means I know very little about farming, cattle, or herding sheep, but my own textbook learning has taught me some amazing facts about the relationship between a shepherd and his sheep. I've learned that sheep are, for the most part, timid and easily frightened little creatures, who each day need the assurance of their shepherd.

Each and every day when the sheep are relaxing, the shepherd will distance himself from the group of sheep, and at some point each sheep individually will come up to the shepherd for words of affection, caring, and love. After the shepherd assures each sheep individually of its place in the shepherd's heart, it will return to the group and another individual sheep will take its turn with the shepherd.

I've actually seen entire groups of sheep respond to the voice of the shepherd calling them, but not to the voice of anyone else. I understand what Jesus meant in today's Gospel when he tells his friends that he *knows* (to "know" from the Hebrew word "Yada" meaning intimate knowledge of them) them and they *know* him, and if they stay close to him, they will never perish or be lost.

Years ago I took offense at being called a "sheep," because for the most part they are simple and timid creatures. The older I get though, the more comfortable I'm becoming with the realization that I am very "sheep-like," and I'm pretty afraid and mindless myself, and without God and Jesus in my life, I'm rather lost and hopeless.

There is another beautiful line in today's Gospel where Jesus says: "A good shepherd lies down his life for his sheep" in order to protect the sheep from the wolves. I've learned that at night after the shepherd herded the sheep into a confined area for the night, the shepherd would lay down and act as the gateway to keep the sheep safe. Perhaps this was the literal image Jesus had of being the gatekeeper, and in a more metaphorical sense, of giving his life away for others.

Congratulations Newly Confirmed:

Congratulations to our 4 children who this weekend took one more step toward the completion of the Sacraments of Initiation begun at baptism. They were once again anointed with the Chrism Oil that marked them as they became members of the Church at their baptism. Chrism is the most sacred of all our three oils, and whereas the other two oils are blessed, Chrism is consecrated by the bishop of the diocese, and then taken to every church in his diocese. This is just another way of showing our connection with our main leader and shepherd of the diocese, Bishop Cistone.

Chrism has a very special smell to it, and it reminds us of the sweet presence of God's Holy Spirit. The name of the oil also speaks of its symbolism. If you take off "m" on "Chrism," and put on a "t," you find another meaning for the oil. It reminds those anointed that they have Jesus' spirit alive and living within them, and this makes them a manifestation of Jesus' presence in the world. In other words, this is what St. Paul meant when he said: "It is no longer I that live, but Christ who lives in me."

In May they will join with us for the first time in Holy Communion and receiving the Eucharist, and that will complete their Sacraments of Initiation. Once we become the embodiment of Jesus' presence in baptism and confirmation, we are fed with his Body and Blood at the Eucharist (the summit and source of the Church's life), and then we are sent out as his presence in the world for others. Our word "Mass" comes from the Latin phrase which means: "Go, you are sent."

What then are we sent as? Perhaps St. Augustine understood it best when he told a group of baptized adults at Easter time: "When you go to the Eucharist, receive what you are and become what you receive." The "becoming", what we receive from God as free gift in Jesus, takes a lifetime to understand, so let us especially pray for these four children of ours, as they join us around the altar of Jesus Christ for many years to come.

A good catechetical question to ask those of us who made our Confirmation and First Communion many years ago is: What are the many ways in which God has anointed you with his sweet presence over the years? What manifestations of the Spirit have you known? How does Jesus feed you with himself and numerous other blessings, and how are you God's food for others?

Congrats to our four children and the children from Nativity of the Lord Parish and St. Paul the Apostle Parish for joining us for this wonderful celebration, and thanks to the volunteers who made the beautiful reception for us afterwards.

Lay Ministry Program Applications:

As we celebrate the Easter Season and move toward Pentecost Sunday in another month, I cannot help but reflect on these previous weeks of joy and sorrow.. With the issues that have been facing us - Bishop Cistone's illness and the police investigations - our parishes continue to offer services that have helped keep our eyes and faith fixed on the Lord. Often these various faith activities, whether it communion to the sick and homebound, or leading small group faith sharing discussions at Alpha, are led by those trained as Diocesan Commissioned Lay Leaders. For many parishes these leaders are Lay Ministers that have been formed theologically, spiritually and pastorally through the Lay Ministry Formation process.

These Lay Ministers offer their assistance through ministry in numerous and varied manners. The formation they receive puts them in a unique position to be of assistance in a parish to the Pastor or the Pastoral Administrator. Funeral planning and vigils, visits to the sick and home bound, leading bible studies, forming disciples through catechetical programs and sacramental preparation are just a few of the many roles they may be able to facilitate in the parish.

The application period for the upcoming fall program is open until May 15, 2018. Do you feel you may be called to this deeper level of formation and service? Or do you need more information regarding the Lay Ministry Formation process? St. Brigid of Kildare Parish in Midland is hosting an information session on Wednesday, April 18, 2018, from 6:30 - 8:00 p.m. for anyone interested in learning more about the Lay Ministry Formation program.

The role of the laity is growing world-wide in our Catholic church. I ask you to prayerfully consider if God is inviting you to take a more active role in parish pastoral ministry.