

## Homily 4<sup>TH</sup> Sunday of Easter

April 25, 2021

Today is Good Shepherd Sunday and we hear that Jesus is the Good Shepherd. In the Gospel we hear about three attributes of the Good Shepherd. He is willing to risk his life to protect his sheep. Jesus gave his life for our salvation. He knows his sheep by name. Jesus knows each of us intimately, he knows you better than anyone ever will. He cares about all of his sheep, even those who go astray. Jesus will never give up on any of us. We can run but we cannot hide. This is also the model for a good parent. I see how much parents are willing to sacrifice for their children. They know their children better than anyone else, particularly when they are young. And parents never give up on their children. This is also a model for a good pastor. We are willing to sacrifice things for our parishioners. We do not know each of you by name, there are too many of you, but we spend years getting to know you. We also care about all of you, even those who go astray because we know that those who go astray need us more than anyone else. What makes for a good parent also makes for a good parish priest, and Jesus is the role model for all of us. When you have found that person or group of people you are totally committed to, you have found your vocation.

Today I want to talk about vocations to being a pastor because that is what I am, that is what I know. I want to start by saying that I love being a pastor. I have tried other things, I have studied psychology, guidance and counseling and law. I have worked as a counselor with disabled people, I was a manager for a state agency and I practiced law. This is better than any of those vocations. I was not unhappy in any of those jobs, but I never felt settled in thinking this is what I will do for the rest of my life. Now I feel that way. Many of my friends that are

my age and younger have taken early retirement. They say to me: “Jim, why are you working so hard. Retire while you are still healthy enough to enjoy it.” I have thought and prayed a lot about that and have come to the conclusion that there is nothing I want to retire to do. I am already doing it. I have never made less money in my life and I have never been more fulfilled. Job satisfaction surveys consistently show parish priests at the top.

The face of the Church in the Archdiocese of Detroit is going to change drastically in the next 10 years. We will go from 246 active priests today to 158 active priests in 10 years. If this trend continues, parish priests will be very rare. We need to encourage our young men to consider the priesthood. One big problem is that our single young adult men in their 20’s and 30’s are not coming to church. Look around the church today. We need to get our single young men back to church. No one is going from not attending Mass to the seminary. Parents have to encourage their sons to become priests. Parents have a great deal of influence over their children. I have talked to many parents who have told me that they do not want their sons to become priests because they want grandchildren.

Vocations to being a pastor start with a love of the Lord. When I began considering a vocation to the priesthood I got much more involved in volunteering at church. Pastors spend almost all of their time ministering at church. All of you bring people here and I minister to them once they get here. Beyond that, you discern being a parish priest the way you discern other occupations. Look at what you like and what you are good at. These are usually the same. You like it because you are good at it; you are good at it because you like it. Parish priests spend a lot of time preparing for and celebrating the sacraments and preaching. People welcome us into their lives at their highs and lows, which is a great privilege. We frequently

provide spiritual care to people when they are in crisis situations. We also have to run the parish. I administer a 2 million dollar budget, hire and manage staff, and make sure everything gets done. And I never do anything alone. I have a great staff and 2,700 families to help.

People tend to think that priests have a very different life, but that is not true. We are not married and have no children but I have thousands of people that call me father. We live in a house similar to our parishioners in the neighborhood. Most of my close friends are lay people; in fact there are very few priests that I know very well. When I go on vacation, I go with lay friends and I do the same types of things that you do. I go sightseeing, go to the beach, and go on cruises. People ask me if I stay at a rectory and have Mass every day on vacation and I do not. I think my life is much like yours.

So, do you want a vocation with almost absolute job security? Do you want a vocation where you will never be rich but you will always have enough? Do you want a vocation where you will be happy and fulfilled? Do you want a vocation that you will not want to retire from because there is nothing else you would rather be doing? Do you want these things for your sons? I highly recommend being a pastor.