



**World Day of Prayer  
for Vocations  
April 13, 2008**

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## HOMILY NOTES

**Fourth Sunday of Easter  
+ Cycle A**

It was 30 years ago this fall that a little known Polish Cardinal stepped out onto the loggia of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome and was introduced to the world as Pope John Paul II. Few had even heard of him before. Few outside the Polish community knew anything about the city of Krakow from where he came, yet as we celebrate "Good Shepherd Sunday" today some three years after his death, it is hard to believe that there was a time that we did not know him or feel his influence. Since his death three years ago this month, he has been called many things from "a saint" to "the great" but far more important than any words that we might ascribe to him are the words that he spoke so often during his ministry as shepherd of the universal Church: "*Be not afraid!*"

These were the very words of Christ himself which he so often used when speaking to his apostles and disciples. These are the identical words that the Vicar of Christ would use to encourage his universal flock at the dawn of the Third Millennium. These are the same words that the Lord continues to speak to us today.

In the Gospel today, Jesus reminds his nascent flock to be cautious of false shepherds or other voices. The threats to the flock are grave; the perils they will face are pressing. Jesus reminds them not to fall victim to those fears by trusting in him and in those he has sent to shepherd them. Whether it is battling direct threats to life and limb by sadistic Roman emperors or facing the challenges of a secularized culture, to some extent the Church has always been persecuted.

Jesus tells us to listen to his voice, but before we listen *to* his voice, we must listen *for* his voice. God is calling us—each and every one of us, yet if we don't take the time to listen, we run the risk of never quite hearing that call. Even though there are different calls for different people, all those calls that come to us from God are great and wonderful. Each of us has been given a choice of either cooperating with the plan of God and thereby help advance his kingdom or not cooperating with God's plans by just doing our own thing and thereby frustrating God's will for ourselves and others.

True, the Lord is calling most people to the married or to the single life, but God is still calling many of his people today to serve him as priests, religious sisters, and religious brothers. Regardless of what your particular call may be, we are reminded on this

*World Day of Prayer for Vocations* that each and everyone of us has an important role in promoting priestly and religious vocations in the Church. No doubt, we have all, in some way been touched by the ministry of a priest or religious. Perhaps it was at a moment of crisis, an hour of need, a time when we needed a helping hand or a good example, perhaps in the care shown to someone we loved as they faced death. Whatever it was, maybe you had the opportunity to say “thanks” or maybe you didn’t, but the greatest expression of gratitude is by helping to provide for future generations good and holy priests and religious who can continue the work of the Good Shepherd. Christ promised not to leave his flock untended, but he also underlined the urgency of praying for “workers for the vineyard.”

Prayer for vocations ought to be part of our normal habit of prayer. As surely as we pray for those who are dearest to us so too should we pray for vocations to the priesthood and religious life. It starts with prayer, but of course doesn’t end there. We should also be willing to actively encourage others to consider the possibility of priesthood or religious life. And why not? After all, we talk to our children and grandchildren about other careers, jobs, and life options, why not at least raise priesthood and religious life as a possibility as well?

So much emphasis is given in our society to fulfilling our own needs or doing whatever one wants. It is no wonder that there is often a clash between the values of our time and true Christian values. The Gospel invites us to consider Christ’s way, not just our own way, for God’s way is always the best way! Following God’s will truly liberates us and allows us all to reach our fullest potential. This is a tough sell today even among those who are striving to live a good holy life. It’s so easy to have the notion that the most important goals are right in front of us: career, family, relationships, material success, etc. Certainly there is good in many of these things, but we need to search for the deeper truth.

Sometimes, we carry attitudes such as: Why does God need me? Why doesn’t he just get someone else? Or someone else could do it just as good as me. I wonder what the world would be like if Peter or Paul had said that? Where would we be without Francis of Assisi or Catherine of Siena? What if Don Bosco had decided just to become a teacher or Charles Borromeo a lawyer? What if Ignatius of Loyola or Martin of Tours had remained in the army? What if Thomas Aquinas caved into his family’s opposition to religious life? What if Patrick had refused to return to Ireland? What if Benedict had become bogged down in the secularism of his day? Or if John Vianney didn’t persevere in his vocation? What if Monica had stopped praying for her son Augustine? Or if Teresa of Avila had given up on her prayer life? What if Frances Cabrini had refused to come to America? Or Katherine Drexel had decided to settle for a life of comfortable philanthropy? What if Mother Teresa had allowed herself to be repulsed by the poor and never picked up that first dying man? What if Pope John Paul II had decided to pursue one of the other numerous career choices open to him instead of becoming a priest? What would our world be without these heroic men and women or the men and women working today in dedicated service to God and his Church? We know how these and many other heroic men and women answered Christ. What we do not know is how those who are being called to serve today will respond. Let us pray that their answer will be a generous “yes” for the sake of the world and the countless lives they will touch as priests and religious. God is calling us to great things. *Be not afraid!*