

Richard



Bishop of Arundel & Brighton

PASTORAL LETTER
for the 4th Sunday of Eastertide

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

On the Wednesday of Holy Week, at the Mass of Chrism, the priests of the Diocese renewed their priestly promises and those present in the Cathedral, representing all the faithful of the Diocese, confirmed the commitment to prayer for our priests and to work with them in the mission the Lord has given to His Church.

Today – Good Shepherd Sunday, the entire Church focuses once more on prayer and reflection for priests and, specifically, for vocations to the Priesthood.

Every one of us has a vocation, a calling, given to us by God so that we can take our rightful place in the life of the Church and the world, bringing the message of the Gospel to those around us in accordance with God's will for us as individuals and for all his people. This is a consequence of our Baptism – life lived in the love that exists in the Blessed Trinity.

Those called to the Ordained Priesthood commit themselves to the service of Christ and His people. The priest celebrates the Sacraments with and for the whole Church, specifically for those he is sent to serve. He preaches the Word in accordance with the teachings of Christ and His Church. He is a leader in the community – a leader through service. The promises of the Priesthood – prayer, obedience, celibacy – enable him to truly give his life in service and to be a sign of the Kingdom of God for the world.

To say that this is, for those called to it, the most wonderful vocation is an understatement. We become the people God calls us to be when we truly respond to his call. Every vocation brings challenges along the way, but also the greatest joy. For those called to Priesthood, this response enables them to find the fulfilment that God Himself desires for them. It is fulfilment found in the Eucharist, in prayer and in the service of all.

Those who have attended Masses of Induction for our parish priests will have heard me ask for prayer for our priests every day. I ask you today to pray for our priests every day, asking the Lord to strengthen and sustain them in service to all.

I ask you also to pray that those in our Diocese whom the Lord calls will be open to listen to His call and answer with complete generosity of heart. Pray for our five seminary students, for those in earlier stages of discernment and for those who have yet to experience the first stirrings of the call to Priesthood. For some – like myself – such reflections can begin at an early age, as a grace flowing from the Sacrament of Confirmation. For others, the awareness of God's call comes a little later in life. The example of a priest, living Priesthood with joy and commitment is an almost universal element in the discernment of a priestly vocation. Like so many priests, I give thanks to God for the example of a priest deeply committed to the service of those in his pastoral care. When the thought of Priesthood is shared with others, it needs to be met with gentle encouragement and prayerful support, especially from parents.

This Good Shepherd Sunday, I invite you to join me in a time of prayer for Vocations to Priesthood in our Diocese, leading up to Pentecost Day.

To assist us in this time of prayer, a leaflet has been produced, outlining an intention for each of the coming weeks and providing a 'prayer itinerary' for this journey to Pentecost. I am grateful to Fr. Tristan Cranfield, our Vocations Director, for putting this together and I know that the prayers of all in the Diocese will bear fruit.

I ask also that, in every parish, a Mass for Vocations to the Priesthood is offered each week. This is already the practice in many places, as are times of Eucharistic Adoration especially for this important intention.

The Good Shepherd calls us to Himself and our priests, through their proclamation of the Word, through being the Lord's instruments in the celebration of the Eucharist and other Sacraments and through their leadership and guidance, hold a necessary place in the mission of the Church that all may come to the sheepfold of Christ Himself.

May this Good Shepherd Sunday and the time that follows to our celebration of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon Our Lady and the Apostles, be a period of fervent and fruitful prayer for us all.

With every Blessing,

+Richard