

Fourth Sunday of Easter
May 30, 2023

Good Shepherd Sunday/ World Day of Prayer for Vocations
All Saints Parish, Syracuse, NY
Sr. Mary Ellen Shirtz, CSJ

In our readings for today Jesus identifies himself as the Good Shepherd who the sheep identify by his voice. My favorite Good Shepherd story is the one where the shepherd realizes one of his sheep has strayed away from the flock. That is when the shepherd leaves his herd to find the one lost sheep. This parable reminds me that when I am lost or straying away from the herd, Jesus comes to find me....

VOCATION in life, we all have one, be it to the single, married, priesthood or religious life. Today, together with the whole church, we join in the World Day of Prayer for Vocations.

Question: Who can identify what this person is.... A full length picture of me in the habit of the Sisters of St Joseph of Carondelet in the mid 60's. I am addressing the call to Religious life.

AND THEN THE CHURCH COUNCIL VATICAN II ended and made several changes in the culture of the Roman Catholic Church. Most identifiable is probably the change from mass in Latin to the vernacular, the language of the people in the pews. This is also the council that told religious communities to return to their founder's mandates. Among these changes is the return to the dress of the day. Many communities saw this as a call to return to modern day attire so as not to set them apart from those to whom they minister.

In the mid 60's we were also encouraged to find the dear neighbor in many different settings and not just teaching and nursing. Today religious sisters can be found in the following ministries: administrators, artists, catechists, chaplains, educators, justice advocates, healthcare providers, missionaries, musicians, nurses, pastoral associates, psychologists, social workers, spiritual directors and probably many others not mentioned.

Our charism as sisters of St Joseph is to always move toward the profound love of God and love of neighbor without distinction. This impels us to Go Deeper, Journey farther, and to respond boldly & creatively to today's world. THE WORLD IS WAITING!

As religious we take vows of poverty, chastity and obedience,

Poverty: propels me to Live Simply so that others may simply live. As members of a religious community all things are held in common.

Chastity: calls me to an apostolic love which is fully human and personal. We choose to love all rather loving one exclusively.

Obedience: this was the most difficult for me (as my parents would agree..) In today's understanding of the vows, I must strive for fidelity to the Gospel. I see these three vows as my super powers that give me the strength to minister to God's people.

Every vocation requires that we do the following:

- Take part in a process of discernment through which one sets time aside to examine the different vocations
- Seek a mentor and/or a spiritual director to accompany you on your journey.
- Adopt a Spiritual practice whereby you daily set aside time each day to pray and be in communion with God.

In addition to daily mass, our spirituality has become more personal and enriching . We pray the Office, the official prayer of the church, we reach out to all in need, we share our prayer lives by what we call the sharing of the heart. Our aim is to be authentic bearers of the Gospel – mentoring in the art of making community happen. Religious are open to the Spirit, for we know that She will lead us into the future.

In my present ministry as vocation director, I have found that women who are aspiring to become religious sisters are now in their 40's or 50's. I do have some in the 20's and 30's but it is this older group that tells me they thought of entering religious life when they were younger and now they are experiencing something is missing in their life. As a novice director, I join them on their journey of discernment.

So let us pray:

Listening to the Call

Holy Spirit,
Our Advocate and Source of inspiration,
guide us in your ways
and show us the path we should travel
as we discern our call
as ministers of the Catholic Church.

Left alone we would flounder.
With your divine assistance, Holy Spirit,
we know that you will lead us
as you did the first Apostles.

Spirit of Truth and Wisdom,
Give us the grace we need to follow Jesus
as a religious sister, brother or priest.
We ask this favor as we ask all things,
in Jesus' name.

Amen