

Homily for 4th Sunday of Easter, Year B

Worth Abbey and St Dunstan's, 25th/26th April 2015

*“Jesus said: “I am the good shepherd:
the good shepherd is one who lays down his life for his sheep.”*

This 4th Sunday of Easter is known as Good Shepherd Sunday because of the gospel reading, where Jesus compares himself to a good shepherd. This particular Sunday is also designated as Vocations Sunday, when we are to pray for vocations and is an opportunity to pray that the Lord will raise up more people to inspire the Church as priests and consecrated women and men. This year, 2015, Pope Francis has also designated as the Year of Consecrated Life, a year when we religious make known the life of the consecrated religious, brothers and sisters. So a double incentive to pray today for vocations. Our own Fr Christopher, in his role as National Vocations Director, has been very successful in bringing this to the awareness of the media this week. Newspapers, TV and radio have picked up on the upturn in vocations to female religious nuns, a rise of 25% – on Saturday full page article in the Guardian for example

The thrust of Vocations Sunday this year is a focus on how a vocation to be a religious or a priest changes not only the life of the person called but also the life of those to whom they will minister. Above all, this is a moment to invite everyone to be involved in the process of changing lives through their prayer for vocations. Coupled with a nurturing atmosphere in homes, parishes and schools, this will enable those who are called to respond to such a vocation.

Everybody is involved in the work of this Sunday, which is a time of grace for all the faithful as we pray together that the Lord will change lives by raising up more ordained and consecrated people.

This might be a moment to say something about my own vocation. I may have mentioned this before but it was the promise of a cup of percolated coffee which first brought me to Worth Abbey in 1968, when as a student a weekend at Worth was on offer, and although I was not especially interested in a weekend discussing theology, the promise of percolated coffee, good food and walks in the countryside clinched the deal.

At the time I was just starting out as a Chemistry undergraduate and my intention was to be a successful research chemist. Eventually the Lord brought me back here and after a long period of thinking about it, I joined the monastery in 1978 at the tender age of 29.

My life here has, I have to say, been a rich and fulfilling one, not without its ups and downs, and it's not over yet. Overall I have experienced and enjoyed a rewarding and meaningful way of life, both as a monk in a community and as a priest, which I am now experiencing in particular way since January as your Parish Priest. A privileged position which I am very grateful to be entrusted with.

When a person accepts the call of Christ to be a priest or a religious, their life is changed. But so are the lives of thousands of people who will be touched through their ministry. Lives are changed through the preaching of a priest, through the care of a religious sister or brother, through the prayers offered by enclosed nuns and monks. In these ways, a life changed in turn changes many lives. Completing this virtuous circle is the prayer of lay people for vocations to the priesthood and religious life, combined with the encouragement of those they know who are considering such a vocation. This too can change a life.

On the front of In Touch I have printed a prayer for vocations. There are many others available. Once a month in the monastery we set aside a night for an all-night vigil of adoration before the Blessed Sacrament to prayer for vocations. This is normally on the first Friday of the month, from 9pm to 6am. In May this will be on the second Friday due to the School confirmation next Friday. Please think about joining the Community in this time prayer and adoration, or if you are not able to, then to make it part of your prayer each Friday to pray for vocations.

In Evelyn Waugh's novel "Brideshead Revisited" there is a dialogue between Charles and Cordelia which goes like this:

Cordelia: I hope I've got a vocation.

Charles: I don't know what that means.

Cordelia: It means you can be a nun. If you haven't a vocation it's no good however much you want to be; and if you have a vocation, you can't get away from it, however much you hate it."

I don't think I agree with that entirely, but for those God calls in a particular way their influence for good is enhanced. God's work, the Good Shepherd's work, work of caring, forgiving, praising and loving, the coinage of our everyday lives is carried out, God's work is done.

The part of all of us in this church today is to pray that those God calls have the grace and courage to answer the