



My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This Sunday is called Good Shepherd Sunday. Every year on the Fourth Sunday of Easter, we hear from John 10, which is Jesus' sermon on how He is the Good Shepherd. It is a beautiful reminder of how Jesus Himself takes care of us. Back in 1964, Pope St. Paul VI designated this day to be World Day of Prayer for Vocations. We remember that Jesus is the Good Shepherd, but that He also sends us shepherds to lead us closer to Him.

First, a reminder of what is a vocation. A vocation is a calling from God. I was at an elementary school recently and asked the kids to raise their hands if they had a vocation. Most did not. I told them they all needed to raise their hands, since every single one of them has been called by God. None of us is an accident. None of us was made by God just to "fill space." Each of us is loved into existence. Every single person in the world was made with a specific purpose – with a mission, a calling. It may take a while for us to hear where God is calling us – and it is very possible for us to say "No" to God, but all of us have a calling.

Most often, when discussing vocations, we think of state in life: priesthood, diaconate, religious life (religious brothers and sisters), marriage, or the single life of service in the Church. All of these vocations are vital to the life of the Church. Of course, the priest is up front at Mass, but that doesn't make him more important. Without the religious praying for and serving the Church, so much more would have failed. Without good, holy marriages and family life, many would not be formed for holiness. Without the single life of service, many would think they have no place in the Church.

We are in a time of noise, though. Too few people are listening carefully for God's call, and so are not responding. We are not just at a point where we have fewer priests and religious, but you may notice that fewer people are choosing to get married and have children. Fewer single people are choosing to serve. All of the service professions are noticing a downturn in "vocations." This is a day to pray for people to be open to and respond to God's call for their lives. Saying "YES!" to God can be intimidating, but it is also the only path to true fulfillment and joy.

As we celebrate World Day of Prayer for Vocations, I invite you to pray for those who have not yet found their vocation in life. Pray that they would be open to God's calling, and have the courage to enter into silence – to hear His voice – and the courage to say yes to His voice.

I invite you to pray this Family Prayer for Vocations:

Father, increase our family's love for one another. May we honor each other in times of happiness or hardship, bearing with one another in love, just as You love us. In a special way, help us strive for holiness in our current states of life. Should You call some of us to the priesthood or religious life, to marriage or to the single life of service, help us to respond with courage and joy. Together, we make heaven our goal, and pledge, with Your grace, to help each other on life's journey to You. Through the intercession of the Holy Family: Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. Amen