



ARCHBISHOP'S MESSAGE

April 25, 2021

Good Shepherd Sunday

The 4th Sunday of Easter highlights the Good Shepherd who gives his life for his sheep. "I am the Good Shepherd, the true shepherd," Jesus tells us. "I know my sheep, and my sheep know me." It is good to know that Jesus knows us well, that he loves us and is willing to do anything to protect us and lead us to fullness of life. Indeed, we are precious to him, and he is willing to risk his life for each of us.

I like this biblical image of the Good Shepherd because it makes me want to imitate him and to give myself out of love for the service of the sheep entrusted to me. On this World Day of Prayer for Vocations, we can certainly invoke the True Shepherd to raise up among us priests animated by the same love as Jesus. Our Church needs dedicated men who know they are loved by Jesus and know him well in order to make him known to others.

In the Archdiocese of Ottawa-Cornwall, we currently have 8 seminarians, two of whom will be ordained to the priesthood soon and three others will become deacons. It is a great joy for a bishop to celebrate the ordination of a person who generously responds to God's call. Let us assure these seminarians of our prayers and support, and let us not be afraid to challenge new ones to consider this rewarding life of following Christ.

Bearers of hope during the pandemic

Struck by a third wave that is once again destabilizing our lives, I note that the prolongation of the pandemic is causing many Catholics to feel frustrated that certain privileges or freedoms are being taken away. The restrictions imposed are severe and can test our patience. No one is happy to see our churches limited to 10 people for the celebration of Mass. We are all tired of wearing masks and practicing confinement. The information circulating among social networks is littered with truths and falsehoods, wise instructions and conspiracy theories, leaving us confused and worried. When we are exhausted and stressed, and many realities are now beyond our control, fear and distrust can easily trap us into taking positions that sow dissent,

doubt and revolt. Even the most well-intentioned people, unfortunately, find themselves in camps that seek to regain control by blaming public authorities left and right and sowing division. It appears in our current frustration that many of us blame those who have the duty to see to the well-being of all and criticize their decisions. Be assured that I do not support any group, even ones self-identifying as Catholic, that seeks to stir up discord and revolt.

As your Pastor, I want to protect my sheep and lead them on the path of hope. Let us be careful. Let us make sure that we carry a message that gives confidence and unites us. I can understand that we share various opinions on different realities of the pandemic. But I believe that we must work together as a Church with our government leaders to fight this pandemic. Even if we don't like the restrictions, I believe it is essential that we take the necessary steps to save the lives of those in our families, parishes and communities.

The Bishops of Ontario have been working closely with the Premier of Ontario since the beginning of the pandemic to ensure that he understands the essential value of our liturgical gatherings and sacramental life. Protocols to ensure a safe and healthy environment in our churches have been developed in partnership with public health authorities. We have done an excellent job and the government recognizes our efforts. It is important to note that, unfortunately, not all religious groups have developed similar protocols and are putting them into practice. In its directives to the various places of worship, the government must treat everyone equally; and this may seem unfair. I can assure you that the directive to limit our numbers in our churches at this time is because the situation has reached a critical stage and it is time once again to take extraordinary measures.

As a bishop, I choose to do my best to collaborate with the whole of society to protect the lives of human beings. Even if I have to make the great sacrifice of limiting the number of people at our Masses, I will choose to exercise charity to preserve the health and life of all. I know very well that this does not please everyone, but I beg you to join me in order to ensure a climate of peace and serenity during these difficult times.

Please continue to pray for me, as I do for you.

Immaculate Heart of Mary, pray for us.

Saint Joseph, pray for us.

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