



The Voice of the Good Shepherd: World Day of Prayer for Vocations

Fourth Sunday of Easter · Year A · April 26, 2026

We live in a world that rarely slows down. Notifications pull at our attention, deadlines crowd our mornings, and by evening

many of us lie awake wondering if we are truly known — truly seen — by anyone. Into that exhaustion and that longing, today's readings speak with remarkable gentleness: *You are known. You are called. You are not alone.*

1. Called by Name — Not by Number: In a world where we are often reduced to usernames, employee IDs, or follower counts, the image Jesus offers in John 10 is startling in its intimacy: the Good Shepherd *calls his own sheep by name*. Not "the flock." Not "the community." Each one, personally. This is how God has always worked. At the burning bush, he didn't say "Hello, Hebrew." He said, "*Moses.*" That same personalness is alive in Christ — and it is alive toward you.

Your vocation — whether to marriage, priesthood, religious life, or dedicated service — is not a job posting you happened to apply for. It is a conversation God has been wanting to have with you specifically, about the particular shape of love your life is meant to take. As Pope Benedict once said so beautifully, "*Each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed. Each of us is loved.*" Let that land somewhere quiet in you today. *Question: When was the last time you sat quietly and asked God: "What do you actually want for my life specifically?"*

2. Learning to Hear Again: Here's something many of us feel but rarely say aloud: it is genuinely hard to hear God's voice right now. Not because God has gone silent, but because so many other voices are so loud. There is the voice of anxiety — *you are not enough, you are falling behind*. There is the voice of comparison — *look at what others are doing with their lives*. There is the voice of distraction — the endless scroll, the next thing, the noise that follows us even into prayer.

Jesus says his sheep *hear* his voice — but that hearing is something we have to cultivate. It doesn't just happen. St. Ignatius of Loyola spent years teaching people how to distinguish the voice that brings lasting peace from the voice that flatters and then empties. Thomas Merton wrote that "*the first spiritual task is to cultivate an inner ear — for God speaks softly.*"

This week, even ten minutes of genuine quiet — phone face-down, no podcast, no music — can begin to train that ear. The voice is there. We simply need to create the space to hear it. *Question: Which voice has been the loudest in your life this week and is it one worth listening to?*

3. The Door Is Open — Not Guarded: Jesus uses a second image that deserves a moment: "*I am the gate.*" Not the wall. Not the bouncer at the door. The *gate* — the opening. So many people carry the feeling that they are somehow disqualified from God's fullness. Too broken. Too complicated. Too far

from where they thought they'd be by now. The gate image dismantles that fear. It is not a barrier you have to earn your way past — it is a threshold you are being invited to step through, into a life described as *abundant*.

That word in the original Greek — *zōē* — means life in its deepest, truest form. Not just survival. Not just getting by. A life that is *full*. Pope Francis puts it plainly: before the Gospel is a doctrine, it is an encounter with a Person — and that encounter is what fills the heart with genuine joy. The door is open. The invitation is warm. You only have to walk through. Question: *What is the one thing you secretly believe disqualifies you from God's fullness — and are you willing to let that go today?*

4. The Shepherd Who Has Walked Through Darkness: The passage from 1 Peter is the most challenging of today's readings, because it doesn't sidestep suffering — it walks straight into it. *"By his wounds you have been healed."* Peter writes these words to a community that was experiencing real hardship. He doesn't offer them a shortcut around the difficulty. He points them to a Shepherd who went through it first — who did not flinch, did not retaliate, did not abandon them when things became costly. This matters enormously for anyone discerning a vocation. The priesthood, religious life, marriage, parenthood, service of any kind — none of these paths are free from sacrifice. But the Christian promise is not that you will be spared difficulty. It is that you will never carry it alone, and that suffering borne in love has a mysterious power to become healing for others. The wound, is the place where the light enters. That is not resignation. That is resurrection logic. Question: *Is there a suffering you have been carrying alone that might look different if you believed someone had already walked through it ahead of you?*

5. The Green Pastures Are Real: Psalm 23 endures across every generation because it answers the fear that lives beneath most of our other fears: *What if no one is actually watching? What if the darkness wins? "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want."* The psalmist doesn't claim to live without the valley of the shadow. He claims — based on experience, not wishful thinking — that someone is *there in it with him*. That is the whole of the Good Shepherd's promise.

On this World Day of Prayer for Vocations, the Church asks us to pray for more hearts willing to trust that promise deeply enough to follow where it leads — even into forms of life they could not have designed for themselves, even into a "yes" that feels larger than what they think they have to offer.

You don't need to have it all mapped out. You only need to take the next step — and trust that the One who calls you by name will not let you walk alone. Question: *What is the one step you already know God is asking of you — but have been waiting for more certainty before taking?*

May this Good Shepherd Sunday give us ears to hear, courage to follow, and the quiet joy of knowing we are held.