

[Acts 13:14, 43-52; Ps. 100; Rev. 7:9, 14b-17; John 10:27-30]

What an awesome four weeks we have gone through! Pope Francis wishing us a Happy Easter one day, and dead the next. Nine days of mourning and prayer for his soul. Only two days of the Cardinal's Conclave resulting in the election of the first U. S.-born Pope Leo XIV. The Holy Spirit has been working overtime, for sure! And today we have a "Triple Header:" Good Shepherd Sunday, the World Day of Prayer for Vocations, and Mother's Day.

It's appropriate for us to consider the nature of authentic vocation. The word itself means "calling." Pope Leo reminded us in his first speech on the front porch, the loggia, of St. Peter's Basilica on Thursday that we are ALL called by God -- all of us, not just priests and religious. But what does it mean to be called? How should we listen for it, and what are we to do about it?

Jesus says His sheep recognize His voice, and because they do, they follow where He leads. Evidently, "call" involves more than a word spoken or message received. It also implies a word followed.

The way we respond is not merely to hear the call but to reply with our behavior. We *follow*, as we heard in last Sunday's Gospel. This response requires a daily renewal of our will.

Consent isn't an item we can hand off once and be done with it. It's never so easy, even when it comes to perpetual vows like marriage, consecrated life or ordination, or the pledge of a parent to a child. Consent involves the little-by-little, day-by-day surrender of the will to a particular purpose. That is a sacrifice!

Consent means “to feel with.” And feelings can change, especially if we allow the events of life to distract us from our purpose. If we intend to “feel with” our primary relationships, then we have to stay close to them, attend to them daily, heed the voice of those whose claim on us is already established. And remember: our response to God’s call for us is a choice, not a feeling.

We do this, mindful that we are imperfect and ordinary. Every day, we have to choose. We may be a priest, sister, brother, wife, husband, father, mother, sibling. Our commitments are still very real.

Like the artist and the musician pledged to create, the scientist and the student to explore, the doctor and the nurse to heal, the business owner to treat employees and customers justly, the novice who learns. Who has influenced YOUR life to get you to Heaven?

Two women who influenced me much in my growing up years were my dear mom Rosemarie and my mom’s sister, Aunt Dorothy. Two worldly-wise women who kept me on the straight and narrow.

Aunt Dorothy passed away the same weekend in 1997 as Princess Diana and Mother Theresa. Mom would follow two years later, in 1999. I officiated and preached at both Funeral Masses. Not Princess Diana and Mother Theresa, I Meant my Mom and Aunt Dorothy! I believe that with the crosses both women bore in this life, they deserve to be clothed in white robes, holding palm branches and worshipping God day and night, and still interceding for me. I pray that one day this will happen!

I have a great respect for and I believe that there is a special place in Heaven for mothers of priests, for wives of permanent deacons, and for parish secretaries. My Mom was all three!

So, I believe she has earned her “Get Out of Hell Free” card!

Three groups interact in our First Reading this weekend: the disciples who proclaim Christ boldly, the Gentiles who receive the message with joy; and the Jewish leaders who react with jealousy and anger. Today, the Church needs men and women, teens and youth who will enthusiastically proclaim Jesus to a hungry world, despite public insult, persecution and rejection. We need “good sheep” to be “instruments of salvation.”

In our Second Reading, we see that every vocation has Heaven as its ultimate goal, and is also ordered toward bringing other people to Heaven. Ask yourselves: when you stand before the throne of God, whom will you have helped get to Heaven?” Who is in Heaven now because of YOUR example and YOUR witness? Contrast this to the Jewish religious leaders who get the prominent women and men to do their dirty work expelling Paul and Barnabas.

The call from the Good Shepherd is being shouted and whispered to all of us, Jew and Christian, Muslim and atheist. We thank God for those were examples for us in this world of faith, hope and charity. And we hope and pray that we can imitate their shining example, so that others can get to Heaven with our help! AMEN, ALLELUIA!