

*Readings*

Acts 2:14a, 36-41

Ps 23: 1-3a, 3b4, 5, 6

1 Pt 2:20b-25

Jn 10:1-10

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To our 21<sup>st</sup> century ears, words like “The shepherd calls his own sheep by name” and “the sheep recognize the shepherd’s voice and follow him” can bring to mind idyllic pictures of snowy white sheep following their shepherd obediently through grassy fields.

Peter, however, in the first two readings, reminds us that Christ, our shepherd, did not have such an easy time of it. Although he came to bring life, many of those who heard his call ignored it, rejected it, or made fun of it. When Christ persisted in his invitation to them to change their lives, they argued with, insulted, threatened, and finally killed him.

Jesus said, “I came that they might have life, and have it more abundantly.” This simple yet awesome statement sums up the purpose of Christ’s life. He came that *we* might truly live.

This was the call of Jesus. And for him, answering the Father’s call meant coming into an isolated, backward country as a simple human being who spent most of his time with simple people doing simple things. He told stories, fed hungry people, consoled the sorrowing, visited friends, and prayed – sometimes alone, sometimes with others. Eventually, he was called by his Father and by the circumstances of his life to take a public stand on difficult issues. Some of his positions did not sit well with some of his listeners. He was called to suffer more and more misunderstanding and rejection by both enemies and friends alike; he experienced the apparent

failure of his teaching; and, as Peter puts bluntly in the first reading today, in the end they crucified him. When you think about it, it is really incomprehensible that *this* should be the way to more abundant life; it's hard to believe that "through his wounds we are healed."

And yet, in the second reading, Peter tells us it is to *this* that we have been called: to follow in the footsteps of Christ and to be patient when you suffer for doing what is good.

By our Baptism, we have been called to form our lives on the pattern of Christ's; to develop, with his help, a willing responsiveness to God's daily calls in our lives. We, too, are called to do simple things: to cook and to clean, to work and to study, to reach out to a friend, to pray. And sometimes we are called to suffer, whether it be the death of a loved one, the failure of a project, or rejection by a friend. Sickness, financial difficulties, day-to-day struggles – in all of these, Jesus promises, is the way to life. Suffering is not explained, but rather is offered as a mystical part of following Christ and completing his work.

In our gospel today, Jesus says that he is both the shepherd who leads us and the gate through which we are to enter into a more abundant life. If we are to experience this fullness of life, we must hear his voice and follow him.

Today is designated by our Church as World Day of Prayer for Vocations, a day to focus on the call, the life-style, the "vocation" that God has in mind for each one of us. Today we are also asked to pray, in a special way, for all priests, religious brothers, and sisters that they may remain faithful to their call to follow Christ as ministers in his Church; and to pray for those whom God is calling today to this way of life, that they may have the courage to respond to this call. It is no secret that the number of priests and religious has declined over the years. While I can personally attest that this way of life is filled with much happiness and fulfillment, as well as its share of suffering and sorrow, as has any vocation, today it seems that there are so many

voices that are calling out to those whom Christ may be calling to this way of life. But Christ has promised that he will never leave his flock untended. The world still very much needs the witness of men and women whose way of life publicly proclaims that God is important and that prayer is essential.

Today, let us pray that each of us will be attentive to the Lord's voice which calls us to follow him to a more abundant life, and that those whom he is calling to the priesthood or religious life may hear his voice and be open to responding generously to a life of prayer and service in the Church.