

## Easter 4B (Vocations Sunday)

*The fourth Sunday of Easter each year is known as 'Good Shepherd Sunday' or 'World Day of Prayer for Vocations'. On that Sunday, the Gospel is always taken from the beautiful tenth chapter of St. John's Gospel where Jesus identifies himself as the Good Shepherd who cares for his sheep, gathers them in his arms and lays down his life for them.*

I know in times past, especially in Ireland, a lot of young men were leaned on somewhat to join the priesthood. One priest, who later left the ministry, thought his mother should have been ordained, not him. However, we can't blame people too much in those far off days – the catholic faith and culture was 'in their bones'

Today the tide has turned. The message of the gospel which we preach will often go against the grain. Some time ago Cardinal Nichols cautioned priests in their preaching to give the people the 'full sweep of the gospel' and not just a watered down version for their own convenience and popularity. But maybe the decline in vocations has something to do with that - watering down the demands of the gospel to blend in with a more secularised culture. They say, for instance that the stricter religious orders of priests and nuns are getting far more vocations than more liberal ones. I wonder why. Are the young people telling us something? Has an older generation of priests and people stripped the gospel of its more challenging bits to make it more appealing to the young? In my opinion they have - all to the detriment of vocations.

On the occasion of my Ruby anniversary I mentioned that there's never been a better time to be a priest. What could be more rewarding than enlightening people with gospel truth amidst the confusion of a world without God? Many mistakenly think, celibacy is the cause of the vocation shortage. But that's hardly true. The cause

is far more likely to do with the suppression of our innate desire for God. Today we have suppressed the sense of God and of the transcendent. By and large people with an exclusively secular mind-set have taken control of the higher levels of government, academia and the media. "We don't do God", one politician reminded us. Twelve years ago Pope Benedict said: "Faith in God, the domain of spirituality, is banished from everyday life or marginalised. Our spiritual side has been suppressed. This is the new hang-up of our time – our silence regarding God". Vocations don't come out of a vacuum.

Vocation shortage, marriage shortage, children shortage, staff shortage are all intertwined. I notice from our baptism register that in 1958 there were over 100 baptisms at St Vincent's. Last year there were about 15. St John Paul II saw this anti-life mentality as indicative of 'the absence of God in people's hearts'. One of the 'ripple effects' of this is a collapse in vocations.

*But for anyone who responds generously to the call to priesthood or consecrated life and lives up to it, Jesus promises a hundredfold in this life and happiness in the next. May his call not go unheeded.*