



APPOINTED TO BE READ AT ALL PUBLIC MASSES IN ALL CHURCHES AND CHAPELS IN THE DIOCESE OF LANCASTER ON THE WEEKEND OF 10/11 MAY 2025

Pastoral Letter for the Fourth Sunday of Eastertide, Good Shepherd Sunday.

My dear people,

In these days after the Easter celebration of Jesus rising from the dead, we experience a hope for a share in this risen life, safe, beyond the reach of all harm. The death of our Holy Father, Pope Francis, casts no shadow across our Easter lives. Yes, it serves to remind us all of our mortality, that the days are passing and that the things of this world are also passing, but as he served the Lord with his life, we believe that his death also serves the Lord. When someone we love dies, they take something of ourselves with them but also leave with us so much of themselves, in the good they did, the example they have given. May his soul and the souls of all the Faithful departed, rest in peace.

By the time this letter is being read in your parishes we may already have a successor to Pope Francis, a new name, a new face, a new Saint Peter. Even if this is the case, we have the same Good Shepherd, speaking the same words to us:

*'My sheep hear my voice,
And I know them,
And they follow me.'*

These words give us comfort and reassurance in these times that Christ has not 'sub-contracted' His work to others. He remains our Good Shepherd and always will.

When Christ instituted the Sacred Priesthood, choosing some men to become Priests of His New Covenant, He did so knowing us to be imperfect, still prone to selfishness, fear, misunderstanding and temptation. Such risks did not prevent Him acting as He did. He believed that every vocation planted in the heart of the believer must grow like wheat amongst briars. He had confidence in the wheat, the soil and the expertise of those who would harvest, to select the good.

On this Good Shepherd Sunday let us thank God heartily for all vocations, and particularly today for vocations to the Priesthood, and let us pray confidently for men to hear His voice and answer His call. Chosen men sounds a rather arrogant expression and can disturb us if it is not identified with the voice of our Saviour and the will of the Father. For some, it is their way to heaven, so long as they do what they are told! Priests are to be Shepherds formed by the heart of Christ. This is not our doing: it is the work of the Spirit.

May your families be places where the voice of Jesus is heard, especially by creating silence for prayer. May your works of charity create a culture where the young can begin to recognise the voice of Jesus, calling them by name, and loving them. May they grow to love that voice and hear it daily, keeping them from all harm, as a Shepherd guards His flock, and leading them to pasture, through the ministry of good priests.

With my blessing,

+Rt Rev Paul Swarbrick
Bishop of Lancaster