

Fourth Sunday of Easter
Good Shepherd Sunday
April 22, 2018
Homily for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass
of
St. Thomas More Catholic Parish
celebrated at
St. Joseph Catholic Church
116 Theodore St.
Scranton, PA 18508
John 10:11-18

In a couple of weeks, we are going to have a second collection, mandated by Bishop Lopes, which will raise money across the Ordinariate for celibate men studying for the priesthood. At present, we have five such men and by fall we will have seven. I am going to explain today, using this morning's Gospel, why this second collection is necessary.

Jesus says in today's Gospel, "The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hireling and not a shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees. . . . He flees because he is a hireling and cares nothing for the sheep." Here our Lord contrasts the work of those who are shepherds for hire and the work He himself has undertaken, that of a good shepherd who is the better choice because shepherding is his vocation.

As the church seeks out men to stand in the person of Christ, *in persona Christi*, in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, the Sacrament of our Lord's Body and Blood, she must be certain that those who are ordained have a vocation to the priesthood. We do not want men going into the priesthood for the money or, really, to receive any other worldly benefit.

Jesus gives us the description of the kind of man we want: We need men who are willing to lay down their lives for their flock, those who will not run away at the first sight of the wolf. Jesus says that those who are hirelings are in it for the money and, as such, are in it for what they can get, certainly not for what they can give. So when the risk appears that they might lose their lives, they reasonably conclude that their lives are worth more than whatever they're getting paid. Indeed, we can't pay anyone the price of his life, for this is incalculable, inestimable. A servant who is expected to put himself between the vulnerable and the wolf who wants to devour them must be in it for the right reason. Otherwise, he will never fulfill his duties properly.

What does this have to do with a second collection for those studying for the priesthood? Well, priests don't get paid very much, relative to others who have the same level of education. Nor do they get paid very much when we consider the importance of their work. For example, celibate priests in our diocese are to be paid in the \$25,000 to \$30,000 range. Married priests are permitted \$25,000 to \$30,000 more. It is not reasonable to expect a man whose earning potential is so low to also pay for his education. This would be to consign a priest to life-long debt. It would also be to discount the sacrifice he's making by placing upon him a burden very difficult to bear.

At the same time, we really don't want to pay priests salaries that would make it possible for them to pay back their student loans. Here's why: Large salaries for any kind of job tend to attract the type of people not necessarily suitable for the priesthood. And money tends to corrupt any professional class when a large number of such professionals have gone into the work for the money.

Without disparaging the good doctors, consider, for example, the medical field: Doctors, whose job it is to heal people, now commonly kill people, not only through the crime of abortion but, more recently, also through assisted suicide. For decades prior to the legalization of abortion, doctors were being paid not to heal people but to mutilate them, performing sterilization procedures that were so common by 1930 that Pope Pius XI condemned them in an encyclical in that same year. Today, doctors will take money to mutilate perfectly healthy faces, stomachs, legs, and even nipples for what is called plastic surgery. And, of course, there is an entire industry, funded by governments across the globe, dedicated to the destruction of human embryos, the fool's errand that imagines the healing arts will be advanced by killing innocent human beings. What could have enticed so many in the medical profession to abandon the Hippocratic Oath if doing so were not so lucrative? Medicine is one field utterly corrupted by inflated salaries; and if I wanted to beat a dead horse, we could go on about lawyers and educators and entertainers but will leave that for another day.

The point is that salaries of clergy in the Catholic Church are intentionally kept low so that we don't attract hirelings pretending to be shepherds. The only priests who will do their job when the chips are down, in season and out of season, are those who love their flocks like Jesus loves His, those who desire to be an "*alter Christus*", another Christ, who would sooner die than see His sheep perish under his watch. A priest must be moved by the faith Jesus articulates at the end of today's Gospel, that even if he must lay down his life in order that the flock may live, he will be raised to life eternal. He is not doing his job for love of money but love of souls; and he does not fear the sacrifices, as there is for him a spiritual reward more precious than any material compensation he might receive.

At the same time, we must not forget that Jesus also said the laborer deserves his wages. We can expect priests to labor for what enables them to get by, but we can't expect them to labor for nothing, if we are to be true to Jesus' intent. Each seminarian has his post-graduate education paid for by our diocese, but it isn't like his summers are free for him to get a job cutting grass. His internships mean he's working for no pay even during those months he is not studying. Therefore, each seminarian is provided a stipend of less than \$50 per week, so he has some change in his pocket while at school or in the field. Those who manage their affairs under such conditions in school—without complaint—show themselves suited for a vocation that does not promise material rewards even as it does provide material sustenance.

Protestants long ago abandoned the ideals I've articulated today. When I was a Protestant minister, it was not uncommon to hear of colleagues receiving six-figure salaries. And we know some televangelists receive seven-figure remuneration. Look at the compromises such men have made if you harbor any doubts about how Catholic clergy are compensated for their labor. And then be generous on May 6, in order that this system that has produced so many saints may in our diocese be maintained.