

DIOCESE OF EAST ANGLIA



PASTORAL LETTER OF BISHOP ALAN HOPES FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER 2016

to be read at all Masses throughout the Diocese during the weekend of April 16/17

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Shepherds in the Holy Land use many different calls and whistles which their own sheep recognise and respond to. When several different flocks have been kept together over night, the shepherds have no problem in sorting out their own sheep in the morning. The leader sheep begins to move and the rest follow – but only those who belong to that particular flock and shepherd.

Whose voice do I follow? So many voices shout at us from every quarter – peer pressure, pop culture, advertising, political slogans, secularism, relativism and so on.

Jesus said: *The sheep that belong to me listen to my voice; I know them and they know me.*

The whole Bible speaks to us of an ongoing story of the call from God and the individual's response. At the beginning of the story of our salvation, Abraham heard the call of God to leave where he was settled and comfortable and to journey into the unknown. He became the father of God's people, Israel. Moses heard God's call and, overcoming many obstacles, led the people of Israel into freedom. Mary received God's unique call to become the Mother of his Son. *I am the servant of the Lord. Let what you have said be done to me.*

All of these said *Yes* to God's call. Jesus Christ received his call to begin his work for our salvation when the Holy Spirit descended upon him at the river Jordan. He listened to his Father's call and did his will. In turn he called the first of his disciples to follow him. The Church has its beginnings in this small community of believers who seek to listen to and follow the voice of the Lord. Through our Baptism, God has called us all into his family the Church. He knows us individually and calls each one of us into a deeper relationship with Him. Our life of faith is a response to that call. It is a journey that seeks to follow that call and to do God's will.

Whatever God calls us or has called us to do, all of us are called to live out our lives faithfully in love for him and for our neighbour.

There are some people who are or who will be called by the Lord into a special and deeper commitment of life to the mission of Jesus Christ for example - to carry on his works of compassion to the most needy men and women of our society; to live out our vocation in the faithfulness and love of marriage and family life; to live in community as a Religious or in the world as a consecrated person.

Some of those first disciples called by the Lord at the beginning, were called to become shepherds of his flock. The Risen Lord shared his Spirit with them in a special way to carry on his mission: *As the Father sent me so am I sending you.* The Lord has continued to call men to share in this mission and the work of shepherding through their pastoral and sacramental ministry for the People of God.

Today is Vocations Sunday when we particularly pray for more vocations to the priesthood of the Church. We pray also for those who are already training for the priesthood.

In our Diocese we have ten men who are in seminary at the moment, and ten others who are discerning whether or not they are being called to serve the Lord in this way. Pray for them all that they may listen to the Lord's voice and then seek to do his will.

And please look around your own parish community and see whether there is someone who is or should be thinking about a vocation to the priesthood. Our parish communities are often the places where vocations begin and flourish. Pray for them, encourage and support them.

However, we live out our calling to follow the Lord, all of us are called to witness faithfully to Him. He needs our hands and our hearts, our voices and our courage, our loving and caring so that his Gospel of love and mercy may be heard by each new generation.

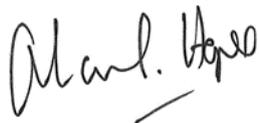
So today, reflect on what the Lord has already called us to do for him.

Pray for those who are discerning their journey into priesthood or Religious Life. Encourage others to open up their lives to the call of the Risen Christ.

The sheep that belong to me listen to my voice. I know them and they follow me.

With all good wishes and prayer,

Yours devotedly,

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The Right Revd Alan S Hopes
Bishop of East Anglia