**THEME:** GREAT FLOCK, FEW SHEPHERDS
**READINGS:** Acts 4:8-12/ 1 John 3:1-2/ John 10:11-18

4th Sunday of Easter

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An “appeal” our Lord Jesus Christ made about 2,000 years ago is still valid: ‘the harvest is rich, but the labourers are few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send more labourers into his harvest” (Luke 10:2). In view of today’s gospel reading, I would like to re-state the appeal of the Good Shepherd as follows: “**the flock is great, but the shepherds are few; therefore pray the Lord of the flock to send more shepherds** ….” This is why I have chosen the theme: “Great Flock, Few Shepherds”.

Beloved, of the great flock of 1.2 billion Catholics in the world, can you guess the ratio of the bishops, priests, deacons, religious sisters and brothers to the lay faithful? It is about **1: 1,000**. What about the ratio of only priests to the laity? **It is nearly 1: 3,000**. Beloved probably you live in a city or town where there are a lot of priests and religious; but the reality across the Catholic world is what I have stated above. Probably in your parish, there are, at least, two Masses every day; but the fact is that there are still places in the world where the Catholic communities have a Mass once in three months. Probably in your diocese more parishes are being created and more new chapels are being built; but the fact is that in some parts of Europe and USA some parishes are being closed down or, at least, being merged with others, while some chapels have been sold out for commercial or residential purposes. Why? Often, the reason is that there are not enough priests to “pastor” these parishes. Indeed, “**the flock is great, but the shepherds are few”.**

Jesus as the Good Shepherd displays a lot of good qualities. Here, we shall mention five of them:

* **Fearless Courage**: Jesus knew what awaited him in Jerusalem, but in order to save us, he fearlessly went there, even in a public manner (Matt. 21:1-11).
* **Selfless Sacrifice**: Jesus says, ‘I am the Good Shepherd, I lay down my life for my sheep. … I lay down my life of my own accord’ (John 10:11, 18).
* **Patient Love**: Jesus patiently looks for the lost sheep (*cf*. Luke 15:1-7).
* **Caring Provider**: Jesus said, ‘I am the door; if anyone enters, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find **pasture**. … I have come that you might have life and have it in abundance’ (John 10:9-10).
* **Constant Vigilance**: Jesus constantly watches over us (John 6:37-39; 17:12).

Every priest should embrace and exhibit the above qualities of Jesus, the Good Shepherd:

* **Fearless Courage**: Every priest should proclaim the Word of God without fear or favour. In addition, he should courageously undertake new missions entrusted to him.
* **Selfless Sacrifice**: Besides the sacrifices inherent in the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience, the priest should embrace other sacrifices which his daily ministry may entail.
* **Patient Love**: With deep love for every soul entrusted to him, the priest should put in place a process by which the “lost sheep” of his parish could be brought back to the Good Shepherd.
* **Caring Provider**: He should be compassionate in feeding the flock with the Word and Sacraments. In addition, he should ensure that the poor and needy receive material support.
* **Constant Vigilance**: He should be available to the flock, and constantly reflect on their (spiritual) needs, and pray for God’s provision of these needs.

Beloved, it should be clear that the life and task of a priest as a shepherd are very demanding. More so, how can he be effective, if he is to take care of almost 3,000 lay Catholics? Imagine a shepherd alone in an open field with 3,000 sheep; can he effectively handle them? Permit me to put it in another way: if it is difficult for a shepherd to handle a flock of 100 sheep (as one strays away), then what about him handling 3,000 sheep? Will many more not stray away? Beloved, **the flock is great, but the shepherds are few; therefore pray the Lord of the flock to send more shepherds**. Amen!