

4th Sunday in Easter – Year A 2026

Acts 2:14. 36-41; Psalm 22:1-6; 1st Peter 2:20-25; John 10:1-10

This Sunday is referred to as ‘Good Shepherd Sunday’, because of the Gospel story. Priests often take advantage of the topic of Jesus being the Shepherd to speak about, and encourage, vocations to the priesthood. With a distinct thinness of vocations to the priesthood, it is understandable that the Bishop also wishes us to do so. If we find Holy Scripture difficult, we study it. If we don’t understand the reasons behind Church teachings, we should read them. Perhaps we all should study the priesthood, as well.

We are familiar enough with the priesthood of the Old Testament, in the person of Aaron, Moses’ brother, and the tribe of Levites, to understand what priests do. They offer sacrifice and prayer for the forgiveness of sin and to restore communion with God. Christians believe that the priesthood of the Old Testament finds its fulfilment in Christ, because he offers the perfect sacrifice to the atonement of all sin and of perfect Communion with God: Himself.

This understanding is perhaps most clearly articulated in the letter to the Hebrews, where the author speaks of Christ being ‘*designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.*’¹ But who is this Melchizedek whom Christ is like? Melchizedek is a mysterious figure, who makes a brief appearance in the book of Genesis. Abraham goes to him after victory over his enemies and offers him a tenth of all he has. For his part Melchizedek offers bread and wine in thanksgiving, and he is identified as ‘*priest of the God most Most High.*’ He also blesses Abraham,

the act of one who has authority over another.² Bear in mind that Abraham is seen as the single most important human figure in the entirety of the Old Testament, and yet Melchizedek has authority over Him.

This Melchizedek is seen then, by the writing of Hebrews, as a figure of Jesus Christ who is to come. This is why he is included in the 1st, and oldest, Eucharistic Prayer said at Mass: ‘*Be pleased to look upon these offerings..., and the offering of your high priest Melchizedek, a holy sacrifice, a spotless victim.*’ So, Christ is the High Priest. Priesthood converges on Christ. But there are two other orders of priesthood which are human, and given to us by nature of our Baptism and call us to share in what properly belongs to Christ..

In the book of Revelation, John writes that Christ has ‘*made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father.*’³ And the first letter of Peter says a similar thing: ‘*You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation*’⁴ The whole Church, therefore, is a priestly people. Through Baptism all the faithful share in the priesthood of Christ. We all offer sacrifice to God. This participation is called the ‘common priesthood of the faithful’.

Based on this common priesthood, there exists another participation in the mission of Christ: the ministry conferred by the sacrament called ‘Holy Orders’, where the task is to serve in the name and in the person of Christ, the Head in the midst of our community, this is the ‘ministerial priesthood.’

¹ Heb7

² Genesis 14:17-22

³ Rev 1:6

⁴ 1 Pet 1:9

4th Sunday in Easter – Year A 2026

The ‘ministerial priesthood’ differs in essence from the common priesthood of the faithful because it confers a sacred power for the service of the faithful. The ordained ministers exercise their service for the People of God by teaching, divine worship, and pastoral governance.⁵

Since the beginning of the Church, the ordained ministry has been conferred and exercised in three degrees: bishops, presbyters (or priests) and deacons. These ministries are irreplaceable for the living structure of the Church: without the bishop, presbyters and deacons, one cannot speak of the Church. Their whole role is directed to the salvation and service of others in Christ.

The bishop receives the fullness of the sacrament of Holy Orders. As successors of the apostles, the bishops share in the apostolic responsibility and mission of the whole Church under the authority of the Pope, the successor of St Peter. Bishops are the successors to the apostles of Christ, and priests are the Bishop’s co-workers, working under his direction and inspiration, so that the apostolic Mission of ‘*go make disciples of the whole world*’ might be fulfilled.

While the Old Testament understanding of Priesthood converges on Christ, the New Testament understanding of Priesthood flows out from him. The demands on the priesthood are extraordinary because the ministry of Christ is extraordinary. It requires a wholehearted response to the call from Jesus. But it is not just for the young man called to priesthood to answer, it is for our whole

community to exercise our common priesthood to discern and encourage alongside him. We are not observers: we are participants in his vocation.

Today, the Bishop has asked that we discern and put forward the names of young men who may have a vocation. There are a number in the parish, although they may not see or understand it yet. The cards are in the newsletters, and so are the guidelines. The love is in your hearts.

The Cure of Ars said: ‘The priest continues the work of redemption on earth... If we really understood the priest on earth, we would die not of freight but of love... The Priesthood is the love of the heart of Jesus.’⁶

⁵ What follows is mostly distilled from the CC 1590-1595, so what lacks originality has authority, and what is original offers , one hopes, clarity.

⁶ Quoted in CC 1589