

GOOD SHEPHERD SUNDAY

*I have come so that they may have life
and have it to the full*

Dear Parishioners,

The parishes have received a message from the Archbishops of England and Wales under the title *A People who hope in Christ*, to be circulated in our communities. Please do take time to read this message which carefully considers the situation in which we find ourselves as a Church and the need for restrictions on the use of places of worship to stem the transmission of the virus, and so preserve life and the common good of society. Given that there is likely to be a phased return to travelling and gathering, Church authorities are planning for this time in consultation with the statutory public health agencies. We all desire the opening of our churches and access to the sacraments, and look forward to that day.

This Sunday, the Fourth Sunday of Easter, is also known as 'Good Shepherd Sunday', since in the Gospel Jesus speaks of himself and his relationship to each one of us in this way. "I am the Good Shepherd," says the Lord. To his hearers, who knew and prayed the psalms, this was a familiar image of God, described in that most loved and sung psalm, Psalm 22, which begins with the words, *The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want*. We should be able to recite it by heart as a most wonderful prayer and expression of intimate relationship with God, containing, as it does, the experience of placing one's total trust in the guiding hand of the Good Shepherd who leads us along the right path and accompanies us on the journey of life in this world to the His own dwelling, where we live forever and ever. The psalm speaks of absence of fear, even if one should walk in the valley of darkness, and contains a prefiguration of the banquet of the Eucharist and the sacraments and, indeed, of Jesus, himself, the Good Shepherd. The trust, hope, faith and knowledge contained in this psalm make it a 'must know prayer', and one that brings consolation in adversity.

The picture of Jesus as the Good Shepherd is not a sentimental one. Some fundamental questions arise for us. Do I want to follow, to be taught and to be guided by the Jesus? The now sainted John Henry Newman reflected on

personal experience, earlier in his life, in the poem *Lead kindly Light*. As he travelled, for a while, *amid the encircling gloom*, he reflects that *I loved to choose and see my path and pride ruled my will: remember not past years*. Many saints have not always followed the right path, but they are saints because they sought that path and, when found, followed the Good Shepherd wherever he led, and who says to us,

I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full

This Sunday is a Day of Special Prayer for Vocations. Also, now we have begun the month of May, let us keep it as a month of special devotion to Our Lady and pray the Rosary.

Fr. Anthony