

Welcome, everyone, and thank you all for being here. A special welcome if you are new to us here at St. Gabriel's. We try our best to be an open parish where you don't have to be a lifelong member in order to enter into the community and join in our mission of growing as disciples of Jesus Christ and helping others do the same. I hope that you will find that to be your experience here. If you don't, please let me know.

Today, we read the gospel in which our Lord speaks about himself as the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep, and does not abandon them in their time of greatest need. A shepherd who has such a profound love for his flock is one that can be trusted. The sheep could have every confidence that their shepherd had their welfare ever on his mind, so much so that he was willing to die for them. Jesus is telling us that we have that kind of shepherd. Our Lord was willing to lay down his life for our sake, so great was his love for us.

He tells us this so that we know we can trust Him when He is leading us. Jesus also speaks about the sound of the shepherd's voice. When their shepherd calls them, the sheep know his voice and follow it. They do not know where their shepherd is leading them; they are sheep, they can't see that far ahead. They do not know what path they will be taking or how long it will take to get to where they are going or what difficulties lay ahead. But the sheep don't need to know

these things, because they know the voice of their shepherd, they know that he is good, and that is enough. They trust that their shepherd would not lead them down a path to destruction.

In this analogy, we are the sheep, the Lord is our shepherd, and He is calling us to follow him. That is the crux of his message. And the path on which he is leading each and every one of us is the path of holiness. That is where our shepherd is going. Whether we are a priest or religious, husband or wife, adult or child, we are called to follow our shepherd and be holy.

Pope Francis speaks about this in his new exhortation called “Rejoice and Be Glad.” In his exhortation, he refers to what he calls “middle class saints.” I think he may be the first person to ever use that phrase. There are the celebrity saints, the Mother Teresas and John Paul the Seconds of the world. They were holy, and they were famous. That’s not what most of us are called to be, which can be a consolation to us. We don’t have to start a religious order or inspire millions of people in order to be holy. Most of us are called to be middle class saints, who live quiet lives of holiness by being faithful husbands and wives, sons and daughters, priests and religious. If we live up to that calling, the world will not celebrate us, name churches after us or give us a feast day. That’s not where our shepherd is leading us. We will simply receive our eternal reward when Jesus says to us, “Well done, my good and faithful servant,” which is all we really need.

Archbishop Hebda referred to this on Thursday night when he confirmed our tenth graders, many of whom are here with us today. In his homily, the archbishop spoke about the gifts that the young people were about to receive from the Holy Spirit, gifts that are given in order to be shared. And when we share them, we are walking that path of holiness. So he asked the young people to share their gifts with the Church, to help us with their youthful energy and passion by serving the needy in our outreach ministries, by teaching our children as catechists, by proclaiming the Word as lectors, depending on which gifts were shared with them. I want to echo the archbishop's request and ask our newly confirmed to share their gifts with us. As I mentioned, we try to be a parish where anyone can enter into our ministries, and I hope you find that that is your experience when you step forward to serve. Doing so will help you walk the path towards being a saint.

Of course, this request carries more weight with our young people when they see us living this out ourselves. The newly confirmed our now fully initiated into the Catholic Church, and will look to us as an example of what that means. When their parents and godparents and fellow parishioners step forward to share their gifts in ministry, they see that. When we step back and disengage from the life of the parish, they see that, too. We are called to holiness. We have been given gifts from the Holy Spirit to share. Are we giving them an example of how to do that faithfully?

If so, wonderful. If not, it's never too late to start. This weekend, we are having our Ministry Fair after all the Masses, which will highlight the many ways we try to use our gifts to accomplish our mission of making disciples. One way to frame this is to say that the parish needs you, which is true. We can't offer all of the ministries we want to offer without parishioners stepping forward to share their gifts. Laborers are needed for the harvest, and the more laborers we have, the greater the harvest will be.

But I would rather frame this by saying these are your opportunities to use your gifts the way God intended. If you have a gift for relating with children or youth, here is your opportunity to use it by teaching them the faith in our formation program. If this program didn't exist, you would have to find some other way to use this gift, which might be difficult to do. But it does exist, so take advantage of it. If you have a gift of compassion for those who need a companion, here is your opportunity with our BeFriends or our nursing home ministry. If you have a gift for hospitality, here is your opportunity with our greeters or in the office. What gifts has God given to you? Have you found a way to use them?

The Good Shepherd is calling us to follow him on the path of holiness. Let us respond to that call, use the gifts that He has given us, and trust that He will lead us to eternal life.