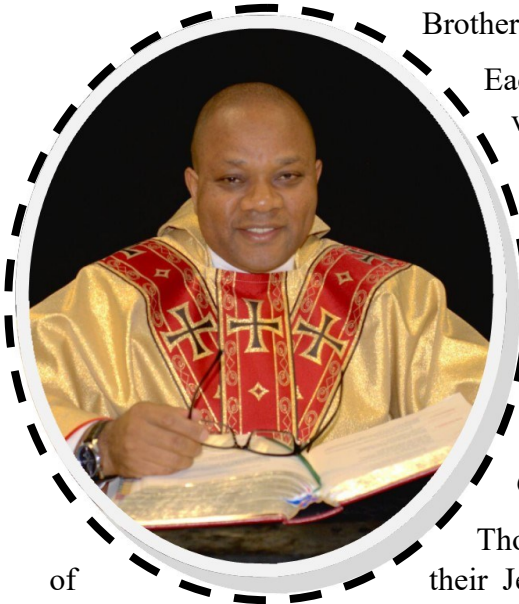


FROM THE DESK OF **Fr. Julius**



Brothers and Sisters in Christ; Grace and peace!

Each fourth Sunday of Eastertide, the universal Church devotedly observes *Good Shepherd Sunday* and the World Day of Prayer for Vocations. Curiously, I am reminded of a long past vocations' rally I once attended; here were young priests and religious assembled to relate the promising qualities of their vocations. Somehow, I was not so inspired that day. What would eventually come through for me was the call to serve others with all my life which our late Bishop Obot instilled in me, hence the strong magnetism for our Lord Jesus, the preeminent *Good Shepherd*.

Those early Christians especially saw Our Lord as fulfillment of their Jewish dream of a *Good Shepherd* (remember the young king David), which had been integral to their identity. 'Filled with the Holy Spirit,' and directing himself to the Jewish assembly, St. Peter proclaims the only true healing and salvation is through Jesus Christ the Nazarene. Can you imagine hearing Peter condemn the people over their colossal resistance to the Truth! In the first Letter of Saint John, as 'children of God,' St. John tells us that we not only become the family of God, but that we will someday be like him!

In the Gospel reading the Pharisees challenge Jesus' Messianic standing; Jesus mildly responds, "I am the *Good Shepherd*." Jesus assures them that he knows his sheep and loves them so much that he is ready to die for them. This offers us both comfort and challenge. Comfort in that Jesus the *Good Shepherd* knows, provides, protects, and loves each of us. Sometimes the *Good Shepherd* faces challenges to protect some sheep. Do you know some sheep who can be stubborn sometimes? This is probably the reason Jesus uses this unfortunate symbol of the human condition. We pray for the grace of growing deeply in Our Lord, to surrender our will to His.

Looking at the dynamic role of shepherds in the here and now, we may consider the hierarchy and also those entrusted with the *care* of others. Hence parents, teachers and medical practitioners qualify as *Shepherds*. It is so critical for us in this role to maintain standards that require great dedication, due diligence, commitment, sacrifice, and vigilance at all times. We are never out of date as we pray for vocations to the holy priesthood and the consecrated life. We pray that the Good Lord send *Good Pastors* after his own heart so that we may have more holy and spirit-filled shepherds to lead, feed, and protect the Catholic community. Amen. For our youth, recall how **Pope Saint John Paul II** prayed to open the minds and hearts of those young people discerning truth in their lives. Regarding the story of the young man coming to Jesus, asking how he could attain eternal life "Jesus, looking upon him, loved him". **May you experience a look like that! May you experience the truth that he, Christ, looks upon you with love!**

Joyous Sunday!