

4th SUNDAY EASTER (B)

- In 1994, Kevin Carter, a South African photographer, won the Pulitzer Prize for Feature Photography after capturing the image of a vulture stalking a starving young girl in famine-ravaged Sudan.
- The award-winning photograph, published first in *The New York Times*, of a child barely alive & a vulture eager for prey epitomized the horror & suffering of Sudan's famine.
- In 1993 Carter flew to southern Sudan to photograph the mass starvation caused by a devastating civil war & once he arrived, he began snapping photos of famine victims.
- Wandering into the open bush he heard a soft, high-pitched whimpering & saw a tiny girl trying to make her way to the feeding centre.
- As he crouched to photograph her, a vulture landed in view.
- Careful not to disturb the bird, he positioned himself for the best possible image.
- He would later say he waited about twenty minutes, hoping the vulture would spread its wings; it didn't, & after he took his photographs, he chased the bird away & watched as the little girl resumed her struggle.'
- The good shepherd of today's gospel is willing to sacrifice his life for his sheep.
- Kevin Carter's award-winning photograph portrayed the harrowing scene of a starving girl, but it also captured the image of the photographer as an aloof, impassive & detached spectator of the human condition.
- He is only a hired man & has no concern for the sheep.
- And who is the hired hand of today's gospel; just whom does Jesus have in mind? Quite obviously, the religious leaders of his own day.
- Jesus 'seems to be saying that the religious leadership of his day cares very little for the people; they're not likely to defend the people against danger; they certainly won't sacrifice their lives for the people.
- But before we start pointing the finger at the Jewish leadership in first century Palestine, what does the image of the Good Shepherd saying to us today. Leaders in today's world, even in the church, can become so immersed in administration that they lose touch with the very people they're called to serve – they care very little for the people.
- An old Jewish Talmudic riddle asks, *'Why did the Tower of Babel crumble?'*
- And the answer is: *'Because the leaders of the project were more interested in the work than they were in the workers.'*
- The rabbis explained that while the Tower was under construction, if a person dropped dead, no one cared, but, if a single brick fell & broke they would all cry out saying, 'When will there be another like it?'

- The story goes that God destroyed the Tower, not because they were trying to reach heaven, but because they were more interested in bricks than bricklayers.
- Today is referred to as Good Shepherd Sunday & is traditionally the time we are invited to focus on vocations & especially vocations to the priesthood & religious life & I could do that & it is valid & good to pray for these vocations.
- Today's Gospel reminds us what Christian leadership should look like.
- Jesus didn't liken it to princes in palaces or governors of provinces, but as Pope Francis hearkened back to what Jesus' understanding of shepherding was to be like – they need to have the smell of the sheep.
- Each of us, if we are responsible in care for others, be that as parents, teachers, older brothers & sisters, friends OR as leaders of nations, peoples & faith communities – are challenged by today's Gospel if we take heed of the call that Jesus extends to us.
- His metaphor was of a compassionate shepherd who sleeps in the field with his flock, one who knows them so well and loves them so dearly that he lays down his own life for them.
- There is also a challenge for all parish communities to encourage vocations to priesthood & religious life from the young within their communities & there certainly is a need that we have for men and women to dedicate their lives to service of the Church by a life of celibacy.
- There are an increasing number of parishes without resident priests & as priests age, they are having to take on the leadership of 2 or more parish communities, **But** this may also be a blessing in disguise: This may provide the opportunity for greater responsibility to be taken on by lay people & an opportunity for everybody to reflect upon the ministry of priesthood to which we are all commissioned by our baptism.
- We need to promote vocations to the priesthood & this needs to be a concern for us all, but I believe until we all have a deeper understanding of what it is to be the Church & share in the mission of the Church, there will not be an increase in those offering themselves for ordained ministry.
- Each one of us has to deepen our understanding of what it is to be Church - each one of us to take a greater share in the mission of the Church & in the life of the parish.
- It's only when we understand how we are commissioned by our baptism to promote the values of the Gospel & the project of Jesus in the world, & when we play a fuller role in parish that we will see an increase in the number of priests.
- The message of the gospel is clear, as church we – all the baptised - have a mandate to be messengers/heralds/proclaimers/ministers of the Good News.
- How can you, how can we, use our imaginations to be shepherds caring for those in need, by utilising our God-given gifts?

- Today is also ANZAC day, & we remember those who have exercised the role of shepherding & laying their lives down for us.
- We remember soldiers and other members of our armed services, including nurses and other support staff, who have given their lives in war, or any other form of armed conflict or on peacekeeping duties. Let us never forget their courage, their sacrifice, their selfless service and their dedication to duty.
- Let us not forget those who have returned home with often massive physical, and/or mental and emotional damage.
- Let us not forget the families and loved ones of those returned service people who have suffered with, supported and loved them and let us not forget, as a nation, our responsibility to support and care for both those groups.
- Let us not forget that ANZAC Day is an occasion for dwelling compassionately on the things that bind us together rather than those that separate us into allies and enemies.
- Let us not forget that the seeds of intentional conflicts and wars ultimately begin in the human heart which can be driven by ambition, greed, arrogance and lust for power.
- Let us not forget Jesus' call in the gospel to all His disciples throughout the ages to be peace-makers not peace-breakers.