

**April 13, 2008 – Fourth Sunday of Easter  
“The Good Shepherd”**

**Readings: Acts 2:14, 36-41, Psalms 23:1-3, 3-4, 5, 6, First Peter  
2:20-25, John 10:1-10**

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Today is commonly known as “Good Shepherd Sunday.” It’s also known as “Vocations Sunday,” a day when our church prays especially for new shepherds and pastors to lead the Christian communities.

It is sad that we still tend to narrow the term “vocation” to those who feel called to the priesthood or religious life. We need to strongly emphasize that every single baptized person has a “vocation.” Everyone is called by God to play a specific role in the Christian community and in the wider community. Unless we Christians see that “vocation” is something that we are all called to, it’s not likely that there will be enough people to meet the needs of our communities. Our communities can only grow and thrive when everyone makes contributions to the well being of the whole.

In our highly urbanized society, today’s gospel will likely feel a bit removed from the image of the shepherd. The gospel uses the image of a shepherd to describe Jesus as a pastoral leader, and this is emphasized on Good Shepherd Sunday and World Day of Prayer. As we consider the concept and meaning of “vocation” it provides a good opportunity to reflect on the role leaders play in our global and local communities. It’s also a time to consider how each of us is obligated to contribute our own leadership to the pool of authority and not just to complain about the folks in charge.

Some years ago I met two young indigenous women, Julia and Elena. They were only 22 and 23 years old. When they came to study at the Institute for Rural Education for Women, they stayed with us in Cochabamba, Bolivia. This institute where I was teaching hosted around 45 indigenous women every year who were from different rural communities in Bolivia. We usually provided training in knitting, cooking, sewing, first aid and some mathematics and organizational tools to use in their community. After one year of preparation, the students would return to their own communities to work and practice everything that they learned at the institute.

However, during the second year, Julia and Elena came back to the institute with specific educational needs. They wanted to learn more about mathematics and how to calculate expenses and income. They wanted to learn about the prices and market value for potatoes and other vegetables. They wanted to learn about management of meetings and organization of communities. They expressed that they did not want to only learn to knit and cook. They were so convincing that we decided to modify our program for that year. Again, after this year of discovering and learning, they returned to their community and I went to visit with them. I had the opportunity to see first-hand, the reality of their daily lives and the needs that prompted their demand for leadership training and not just cooking and sewing.

They lived in an isolated community, where the only income their people had came from cultivating potatoes. This community of Alalay was in the middle of the mountains between the Quechua and Aymara cultures. They didn’t have access to public transportation, so it was impossible to bring their products to the main cities. Instead, they would sell their potatoes to middlemen who would, in turn, transport them to the big cities and sell them for three times more than what they paid. Julia and Elena, in their contact with the Institute and

with the city, realized that the people in their community were victims of exploitation by the people who had means to get the potatoes to the cities in big trucks. They saw their potatoes selling for three times more than what they were receiving back in their community.

Thanks to the awakening of these two young women who used their studies and personal initiatives, a community was organized and found the strength to fight against this injustice. These women organized a union of potato producers and fought the exploitation that robbed them of fair prices for their vegetables. They successfully assumed the role of leaders and through and with their community, fought for their rights. And this movement was further extended to other communities in the area.

Can we attribute leadership and good shepherding to Elena and Julia? Yes, we can. They were committed to change an injustice that was being done to their community. Day after day, month after month, year after year they made this change happen. All of their studies and education were used to uplift the quality of life in their community.

When Jesus said, “I am the Good Shepherd and I lay down my life for my sheep,” He spoke of a “life” commitment to his flock – the 24-hour, seven days a week, 365 days a year kind of commitment that enabled him to say, “I know mine and mine know me.” A Shepherd is the essence of commitment. Elena and Julia were true Shepherds in their dedication to their community.

I don’t know if Elena and Julia are familiar with this gospel image, but it is clear that they were good leaders, good shepherds in their vocation of service and used their knowledge to become committed, caring and courageous catalysts for change. They challenged a system of exploitation and also the educational program at the Institute. Thanks to them, we had to review and change our program to serve the needs of the women, so that they could be better prepared to be instruments for social change.

The gospel today ends with one of Jesus’ most beautiful statements, “I have come that they may have life and have it in abundance.”

Good leaders must make this statement their foundation for service – for leadership *is* service. Julia and Elena worked hard to make it possible for their community to have a better life and have it in abundance!

### **For more information:**

Exercise your power to choose good leaders in this election year. Read more about the global impact of U.S. political and economic decisions in Maryknoll’s *Loving Our Neighbor in a Shrinking World*, a resource developed by Maryknoll missionaries who witness the global impact of U.S. political and economic decisions. Through this resource, Maryknoll missionaries encourage voters in the 2008 elections to scrutinize candidates’ policy proposals through the lens of those who, both in the United States and overseas, lack basic necessities, endure the scourge of racism, live with gender-based discrimination or feel the immediate impact of climate change.

*[Email for a copy, or find the election guide here:](mailto:ogc@maryknoll.org)*  
[www.maryknollogc.org/2008elections/index.htm](http://www.maryknollogc.org/2008elections/index.htm)

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