

SERMON KRIJTBURG SATURDAY, APRIL 24TH 2021

on John 10, 11 – 18.

Fr. Gregory Brenninkmeijer SJ

Today, a week ago, many of us probably witnessed the funeral of Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh. It was sad and magnificent. Everything seemed to be perfect for a man who was held in high esteem. On the altar in Saint George's Chapel lay all his medals, all the ornaments of knighthood bestowed on him, amongst those 'The most honorable and illustrious order of the Garter'. It was fitting that Prince Philip was a member of that distinguished order, because its motto and principal object is: "Ich Dien", which means "I serve". And that is exactly what Prince Philip did all his life. He served his wife, the queen, giving up his own career to be the rock at her side. He served the country, the people, who payed him back with their gratitude and admiration.

Today, my dear friends, we celebrate 'Good Shepherd Sunday'. Jesus says of himself: "I am the good shepherd!" It was an image well known in biblical times. The prophets had seen it coming. God would eventually come to lead his people, the sheep of his flock, to safety. In our country we have about ten or twelve herds of sheep left with their shepherds. They are not shepherds because of the great salary they earn. They choose this profession because they love their animals, love to serve them, look after them, love nature and the freedom every day, and are payed back by the trust their sheep show them and by the beauty nature spreads around them every day.

"I am the good shepherd" says Jesus because that is what He did all his working life. Like a real shepherd He traveled up and down the country, talking to people, curing their sick, consoling the poor and feeding the hungry. And all that, not because of the big salary he never earned, but out of love for the people, serving them, and in all that doing the will of his heavenly Father. Most of the cured were very grateful. His friends admired Him, but his greatest reward must have been the unwavering love of his Father, who had sent Him not to be served, but to serve.

Today, my dear friends we celebrate 'Vocation Sunday'. We have to pray hard that the Good Lord sends us many Good Shepherds. There is a great need for priests, deacons, religious, and volunteers of every kind, to keep our church going. But there is also a great need for teachers in primary and secondary education. There is a great need for nurses and hospital personal. There is a need, a huge need for all sorts of workers who choose a career of service and not a career of the big salary. Those careers we call vocations, because they are not motivated by the money they generate, nor by the influence they guarantee in society, but by the human, internal or spiritual satisfaction they give by being of service to our fellow men. People feel their job as a calling and want to answer that call to the best of their ability.

I can only speak for myself. I did not become a priest or a jesuit because one day I heard a voice calling me: 'Hi, Gregory, I want you to bcome a priest!' No, it was the example of others that showed me the way. Being born in a catholic family faith was part of my life. Stories of saints, of missionaries and other inspiring people made me want to be like them. I never regretted that I chose that way of life, although I had never imagined that it would

turn out the way it did. People often think it must be terribly difficult to live a celibate life. It sometimes is. But I know that being married sometimes is not that easy either. I found the reward during my life quite astonishing. The trust people have shown to me, the gratitude I experience. When after a real confession I, in the Lord's name, gave the absolution and I see the relief on the face and the joy in the eyes, I feel deeply happy having witnessed a miracle. Anointing a sick person and experiencing the relaxation and peace it often brings, is a huge satisfaction. And on my way home I glorify the Lord who, through my words and hands, through my humble service, works wonders again and again. That is a reward no money can buy.

For a few years I was a teacher in a school. I was no good at that at all. But I did enjoy greatly to see young people develop their many talents. To see them grow and become personalities in their own right. That experience easily surpasses the only salary I ever earned. And what a joy when one of your pupils invites me, years later, to bless his marriage.

In these times of corona pandemic we regularly see nurses appear on television. They tell us about the hard work and the long hours their profession asks of them in these stressful situations. But I always see pride in their eyes and the conviction that their service is essential and often lifegiving. It is their vocation, and their reward is certainly not first of all the salary they earn. Their reward is in the eyes of their patients, and in the health that, through their service, is restored in a father, a mother, a child, a lovedone.

You and I, my dear friends, are hopefully surrounded by people, who through their service, paid or voluntarily given, make life bearable, worth living and sometimes a source of joy. Just think of all the volunteers of our Krijtberg community. The servers, the readers, the lady looking after the flowers and all the musicians. The stewards, welcoming you when you come to church. We even have volunteers who on Friday afternoon help to clean the church and there is always room for a few more. All their service makes this church a house of prayer where you are invited to be together with our Lord, week after week. Their reward...? Your presence, every positive remark, and the God Lord who gave the example as our Good Shepherd. One day He will say to each and every one of his servants: "What you did for one of the least of your brothers and sisters, you have done for me."  
Amen