

April 17, 2016 - 3:00 p.m. - St. Augustine Cathedral

Fourth Sunday of Easter/Annual Bishop's Scout Mass

It's always a special occasion when we are able to visit the cathedral, but this year, because we are in the midst of the Jubilee Year of Mercy, it's even more special. Pope Francis has designated that every cathedral throughout the world is to have a "Holy Door", as there is at St. Peter Basilica in Rome, and that throughout the Jubilee Year, any "pilgrim", that is any person who comes to the cathedral and goes through the Holy Door with the proper disposition (usual conditions of confession in the recent or near future, Mass/Communion [which we're doing right now], prayers for the Holy Father) will receive a plenary indulgence. I urge all of you to take advantage of this special opportunity - make it a prayerful and spiritual "moment" during your visit here to our Mother Church.

I look forward to this annual Mass with great joy every year. I have great love and respect for the scouting program, and I am very grateful to all those who work so hard throughout the year in organizing, planning, coordinating and overseeing the Catholic scouting program throughout the diocese. And I am very proud to say that our Diocesan Scouting Committee, for the 4th year running, has been recognized by the National Catholic Committee on Scouting with the Quality Diocese Award! I also want to thank and commend all those adults - those here and those unable to be here - who are scout leaders - and all parents who support the scouting program in so many different ways.

For me, what makes this annual event so special is that we come together first of all to celebrate Mass, the very central mystery of our faith. And because we usually have this event in the spring, and during the Easter season, we usually get to celebrate the added joy and new life of Easter.

But today is an even more special day because this 4th Sunday of Easter is called Good Shepherd Sunday. Scout leaders and shepherds have a lot in common; therefore, it makes sense that scouts and sheep probably also have a lot in common.

We just heard today's beautiful Scripture readings. In the First Reading, from the Acts of the Apostles, we heard about Paul and Barnabas, beginning to make their missionary journey witnessing with great joy to the risen Lord. As we know, not everyone agreed with them, but their preaching is a very good lesson in religious tolerance.

In our Second Reading from the Book of Revelation we heard about a vision - "a great multitude which no one could count from every nation, race, people and tongue." These were the saints, just like us, who have completed their earthly journey. They have "survived the time of great distress... have washed their robes and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb... every tear is wiped from their eyes."

And in today's Gospel, we heard about Jesus, the Good Shepherd: "My sheep hear My Voice. I know them... They follow Me... they shall never perish... No one can take them out of My Hand."

I'm sure that when you think about what it is that you like about the scouting program, you probably come up with lots of different and wonderful aspects that you enjoy.

What I think are some of the best things about scouts are very consistent with today's Readings. Let me explain.

Let's think about the First Reading. Scouting teaches standards/principles/values that are pretty much consistent with our Faith. Scouts are taught to be tolerant and respectful of others, while standing up for what they believe in, just like Paul and Barnabas who did the same. When they ran into opposition or disagreement, they peacefully, but firmly, "shook the dust from their feet" and moved on.

Similarly, let's think about the Second Reading. Scouting teaches loyalty/fidelity/perseverance, which is consistent with how our Faith teaches us to practice the virtues. We know that is not always easy, and there are always challenges, but we need to "survive the time of great distress... (so that we can) stand before the throne with our robes washed clean and made white in the blood of the Lamb".

And finally we think about the Gospel. Scouting teaches to live by the scout law. That "law" is different from what other young people are taught - a different "voice". In very many ways, the "voice" of the scout law is very consistent with the voice of Jesus Who calls us to follow Him.

At the end of today's Mass, there will be awards and medals passed out to many of you here. The scouting program is built on that sense of awards and recognitions for truly adhering to the scout way of living, and that's wonderful.

Today's Awards are recognitions of spiritual advancement: Girl Scouts: God is Love (K-Gr.1); The Family of God (Gr.2&3); I Live my Faith (Gr.4-6); Boy Scouts: Light of Christ; Parvuli Dei; Ad Altare Dei; Pope Pius XII; Pillars of Faith; Major Awards: for Girls/Venture Scout, the Summit Award; for Boys, the Eagle Scout Award. And there are awards for adult leadership under the patronage of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, St. Ann, St. George, and the Bronze Pelican.

Scouting is a wonderful way to help form us as good citizens, and good persons.

The Voice of Jesus calls us to do the same - and even more; Jesus calls us to be saints. Jesus calls us to not only hear His Voice but to follow Him - to listen to Him. Jesus wants to give us so much more than patches, awards and medals - He wants to fill us with much more than a sense of accomplishment in this world.

In so many ways that are consistent with scouting practices, Jesus calls us to practice the virtues; in ways that are consistent with scouting practices, Jesus asks us to practice what we call the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy; just as in scouting, we look to other scouts as role models, Jesus asks us to have Him be our standard/our model. Jesus asks us who are like sheep to follow after Him, the Good Shepherd.

As we think again about the Holy Door, Jesus leads us through the gate into the right ways, and sometimes through narrow doors into the verdant pastures where we will find all that we need.

In that regard, I would ask each of us to imagine ourselves as a sheep, and to think of Jesus in this beautiful image of the Good Shepherd. While doing so, I ask you to consider making three resolutions on this beautiful day. 1) Make sure that you take the time to get to know Jesus' Voice - it should be the main Voice, among all the other "voices" that are calling to you for attention; it will be the Voice that will always have your best interests at heart, even if at times you might be asked to do things that are hard to do. Listen to Jesus' Voice. Jesus' Voice will sound a lot like those in your life who love you and want what is best for you, including your parents and your scout leaders. Trust Jesus' Voice more than any other! 2) Secondly: pray for those who speak, teach, and lead in Jesus' name, which includes Pope Francis, your parish priests, and me. It also includes your parents, your scout leaders; and sometimes, when you're in a position to be helping to lead younger ones, that will even include yourselves. Pray that those

who speak/teach/lead in Jesus' name will always speak the Truth, no matter what. 3) And finally, make sure that you ask Jesus regularly to give you the grace to truly follow Him. What does that mean? It means to believe what Jesus believes; to love as Jesus loves; to defend the dignity of the human person no matter what; to show compassion to those who otherwise are ignored by the rest of the world. It means to pray for the grace to choose the Vocation that God intends for you to live. It means to trust that God's Ways will lead you to the greatest happiness of all - to live with Him in Heaven.

Jesus is our Good Shepherd Who will always be calling us to follow Him. As long as we hear His Voice, we will never get lost, and we will live in His Eternal Life.

God bless you, now and always.