



# THE ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF LAS CRUCES

## *Office of the Bishop*

April 26, 2026  
*Good Shepherd Sunday*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today, the Church celebrates Good Shepherd Sunday, and she invites us to pray for vocations to the sacred priesthood. We ask the Lord to continue to call forth and send workers into the vineyard, and we also pray that he would protect and sustain those who already serve the Church as ordained priests.

I am sure that like myself, you too are grateful to the Lord for the twenty seminarians we currently have in formation at our two diocesan seminaries, Saint Joseph Diocesan Seminary and Redemptoris Mater Diocesan Missionary Seminary which I decreed for the Diocese of Las Cruces last year (2025). And for the young men who have recently been inquiring about discerning a vocation to priesthood. It brings me great joy to witness the action of God's providence and His answer to your fervent prayers.

On this occasion, soon after returning to Rome from an apostolic journey, Pope Leo ordained eight men to the priesthood for the Diocese of Rome. On this World Day of Prayer for Vocations, the Church directs our attention to the mystery of the Good Shepherd, who reveals his love through a self-giving that is ultimately fulfilled in the Paschal mystery.

In the light of Christ, the priestly vocation is tied to the "attraction" and compassionate gaze of the Good Shepherd — because the shepherd is the one who lays down his life for the sheep, and because, in him, the Father's saving will becomes present in the life of the Church.

Vocations grow when they are truly embraced, nourished, protected, and accompanied. Only when the environment of faith is sustained by prayer, and when the Church supports those discerning the call, can God's invitation blossom and mature into a path that brings happiness and salvation to both the person called and the whole world.

It is saddening to see that many young men search for purpose and meaning, yet do not realize that there is a vocation — possibly the very one God is offering them — that can be deeply fulfilling. Through priestly ministry, a man can touch lives in ways that no one else can, because the priest acts in the person of Christ the Good Shepherd, whose pastoral mission is marked by sacrifice and self-giving. The Gospel shows us that Christ's shepherding is

not vague or sentimental; it is real, intimate, and life-giving. The Good Shepherd knows his sheep, and they come to know his voice.

And so the calling to priesthood continues to challenge misunderstandings — especially the view that celibacy is simply a "problem to be solved." The priesthood is, in fact, a radical gift: a daily willingness to give one's life for the Lord and to feed the flock through the grace proper to this vocation, which finds its root in Christ's own self-offering for his sheep.

As I conclude my thirty years of priestly service, I cannot help but echo the same conviction expressed again and again by the Church's shepherds: there can be no greater joy than to risk one's life for the Lord when he calls. The Good Shepherd does not promise a life of ease; he promises a life of deeper meaning — because he lays down his life, and he does so freely, to bring others from death to life.

Therefore, on behalf of all those who, moved by the love of Christ and desiring to feed his flock, have left everything behind for the sake of the Kingdom, I encourage us all to pray fervently to the Lord of the harvest to send laborers into his vineyard. And let us also pray that, through our own interior life, we may learn to experience more and more the beauty and goodness of God in our daily lives — so that, when the Lord calls, our hearts will be ready to hear and to respond.

May Christ, the Good Shepherd, sustain the Church with faithful priests and generous vocations. And may he gather us all close to himself, who lays down his life for his sheep and leads them out in safety.

In Christ the Good Shepherd,

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✠ Most Reverend Peter Baldacchino  
Bishop of Las Cruces