4th Sunday of Easter, 5/8/22—5:00 PM and 11:30 AM

I have here a ceramic vase that was made by a friend of mine. It started out as a lump of clay, and she shaped it on a potter’s wheel. When I learned that she made pottery like this on a wheel, I asked her for one of her creations because of something that God told the prophet Jeremiah in the 18th chapter of his prophesy. There God says to Jeremiah, ***Can I not do with you, Israel, as this potter does?” declares the Lord. “Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, Israel”*** (18:6).

I understand that there is a conjunction, a convergence, of planets currently going on right now in the morning sky, a convergence of Mars, Venus, Jupiter, and Saturn. Even more important than that convergence, there is a convergence of liturgical themes this Sunday. On the Fourth of Easter every year, we hear from the tenth chapter of St. John’s Gospel where Jesus speaks of himself as the shepherd and us as his sheep so this Fourth Sunday of Easter is always called **“Good Shepherd Sunday.”** Because of this shepherd theme, this Fourth Sunday of Easter is also called **“The World Day of Prayer for Vocations,”** priestly, diaconal, and vowed religious life vocations. But it’s also **Mother’s Day** reminding us that all of us are called by our God to be shepherds and to shape him, Jesus, in each other, and that is where this ceramic vase comes into play. In the first sense, we are called to be grateful for those who have shaped Jesus in us, but **we also have to be careful lest we damage or destroy the Jesus being shaped** in other people like with this vase.

First, we all have to be grateful for those who have shaped Jesus in us. I am most grateful for those who have shaped Jesus in me. I am most grateful for my parents who, though not perfect people, shaped Jesus in me and my six siblings by the joy and love with which they lived their lives. They truly provided a fertile soil for the life of **Jesus to take root and to flourish**. But I am next most grateful for a newly ordained priest who came to our parish when I was a seventh grader, a priest by the name of Paul Zipfel for whom I was an altar server, a man who, by his great kindness, planted the seed of priesthood in my seventh grade mind, a man who preached my first Mass, a man who later became the Bishop of Bismarck, North Dakota. Without him and his great kindness planted in me, I would not be standing here on the other side of this altar today. We all have people like this in our lives for whom we need to be always grateful, for they are Jesus’ hands shaping us like the hands of my friend shaped this vase.

But, while we all have to be grateful for those who have shaped Jesus in us, we also have to be careful about what can shatter Jesus in the vases that you and I are but also how we can shatter Jesus in the human vases that have been entrusted to us. What can shatter Jesus in the vases that you and I are, what can shatter Jesus in the vases that are entrusted to us is anger.

I remember some years ago hearing a speaker giving each of the decades a different description for instance like the “roaring twenties,” and he described the decade of the nineties as the “angry nineties.” It seems to me that each of the decades since the 1990s could all be described as angry decades. Now anger does have its place. Anger is a symptom telling us that something isn’t right, like a fever telling us that something isn’t right with our health. But the problem is that we often react in anger over frivolous things that don’t really matter; the problem too is how quick we are to be angry. Earlier this week, I googled the words “slow to anger” and came across a website, titled “100 Bible Verses about ‘God Is Slow to Anger’” where one finds verses as Psalm 108: ***The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love,*** or Paul’s letter to the Ephesians 4: ***Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger,*** or the letter of St. James 1***: For the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.*** Again anger has its place, but, when it is used indiscriminately or too often, it can damage or destroy the image of God in another person. It’s for this reason that anger is described as one of the seven deadly sins.

What can help us deal with anger positively is a saying that a person I knew coined for himself: ***“Better blood in the mouth than blood on the floor”*** which meant that it’s better to bite your tongue than to say something for which another person will hit you in the mouth! On this Good Shepherd Sunday, please keep in mind this hand-shaped vase. May we be grateful for those who have shaped Jesus in us. May we be aware how God is calling each one of us to shape Jesus in those around us, but may we be especially aware of how anger can shatter that clay pot, the clay vessels, that are the people who near and around us.