



DARE TO DREAM

4th Sunday of Eastertide – Listen to my Voice

Week Beginning 25th April

Before you begin the prayer...

Jesus, in today's Gospel, refers to himself as the Good Shepherd, the shepherd who is always there for his sheep. Jesus distinguishes himself from the hired hand whose interest in looking after his sheep is minimal. Rather, Jesus is committed to caring for each and every one of his flock. He will not run away when the wolves come, he will not run away when life gets tough. This shepherd is in it for the long haul, even to the point of giving his own life.

In the countryside of the Jordan, the Bedouins tend their sheep whilst living in tents. The shepherds sit and talk with one another, share their food and allow their sheep to graze. When it is time to move on it is remarkable how each shepherd can gather his own flock away from the others. He just needs to call, and the sheep follow – they know his voice. Within a flock of sheep there is no hierarchy and so they need a shepherd. They learn to hear and understand his voice, his smell, and his behaviour. The life of the shepherd is a tough one incorporating long hours, hard work and sacrifice – all because of a devotion to his flock. A good shepherd cannot afford to be afraid of anything.

If we are to be followers of Christ, we also have to be shepherds, good shepherds to one another. Pope Francis famously said to his clergy that he wants them to have the 'smell of the sheep' in other words, to be really immersed in the messiness of life. But it is not just the clergy who need to do this. We all must shepherd with confidence, unafraid and steadfastly.

As we emerge from the pandemic, this is even more important. We need to support those who are struggling, those who are frail, nurture those who are weak, comfort those who are afraid and lead back those who are lost. This is what a good shepherd does. This is what Christ has done for us. This is what we must do for each other.

This Sunday, we mark not only Good Shepherd Sunday, but also the World Day of Prayer for Vocations—at a moment when the need is greater than ever for more to answer the call to serve and be shepherds. As we mark Good Shepherd Sunday let us pray for all vocations—and the vocation

each of us has as a Catholic Christian and a person of faith. Let us reflect on what our Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, has shown us and taught us—and the example he has given us.

Video - Watch and listen to Fr. Colin Mason

Prayerfully read this passage from the Gospel of John 10:11-18

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So, there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason, the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father."

- Take some time to ponder on the words you have just read.
- Notice if there is anything, a word or phrase that stands out for you.
- Read the passage again and then reflect upon all or some of these questions: if you are doing this as a family or a group, make sure everyone is given the opportunity to speak.

Personal Reflections

- What is your understanding of vocation? Do you believe God has called you in a specific way and how have you responded?
- Do you see yourself as a shepherd? Can you relate to the qualities that a shepherd needs to have to be able to do the job well?

Now thinking about your parish and local community

- What is your understanding of servant leadership? Are there people in your Parish who live like this?
- Pope Francis' expectation that his clergy 'smell of the sheep'. Is this the nature of your parish – a parish that is truly concerned with the messiness of people's lives?
- If our parishes are to be genuinely welcoming it requires parishioners to be people of compassion and conviction, people of mercy and tenderness, who are willing and able to genuinely open the doors to anyone who, even tentatively, wishes to come in. Are we ready for that and if so, what are the signs that we are?

Action

- Reflect on the qualities of what it means to be a welcoming parish and identify three key things to introduce or change that will encourage those on the outside to cross the threshold.

Finish with a prayer asking the Holy Spirit for the grace to respond.

