

Shepherding Each Other



The Gospel reading for the fourth Sunday of Easter is always taken from chapter 10 of John's Gospel, where Jesus proclaims that he is the Good Shepherd at a time when people experienced suffering and persecution at the hands of their leaders. Jesus reveals the face of God in the form of a shepherd leading his flock, feeding, nurturing, defending and even laying down his life for them.

Some of the earliest Christian art from the catacombs in Rome depicts Jesus as a shepherd. The shepherd is an ancient biblical image which would have been very familiar to the first Christians. The shepherds of Israel had small flocks that were trained to respond to the unique call of their particular shepherd. For protection at night several flocks shared a communal shelter where a shepherd physically lay down across the entrance, keeping away thieves and wild animals.

It might be a challenge to our imaginations in a country with huge flocks of sheep that are herded by dogs, planes and motorbikes, to appreciate the care and protection of a shepherd that Jesus uses to illustrate the love and protection he offers us.

LEADING AS A DISCIPLE OF JESUS

Reflecting on Jesus as the Good Shepherd also serves as a reminder that shepherding each other in Jesus' name is part of the vocation of every disciple. It is because we are baptised into Jesus the Christ that we share in his mission

of service, carrying it out as Jesus did, acknowledging and sharing in his leadership. Through baptism we are called to become our true selves in whatever role we may have in life by being gifts to each other through leadership that is modelled on Jesus.

The point is not to become a leader, the point is to become yourself, and to use yourself completely – all your gifts, skills and energies ...

You must, in sum, become the person you are called to be and enjoy the process of becoming.

Warren Bennis, *On Becoming a Leader* (New York: Basic Books. 2009)



St Callixtus Catacomb

JESUS' LEADERSHIP

Theologian Leonard Doohan writes that the Scriptures offer us six components of Jesus' leadership:

1. Jesus' leadership finds its source in a spiritual relationship with God. A leader's authority does not come from position, status, wealth, but from union with a loving God.
2. Jesus' leadership expresses itself in loving solidarity with all men and women. A true leader does not restrict his or her responsibility to immediate followers, but knows he or she contributes to a social vision that impacts humanity.

3. Jesus' leadership offers a new comprehensive way of looking at life, a new model for society. A leader works for change, subverting existing paradigms and offering a new one as part of a vision of renewal.
4. Jesus' leadership challenges the status of the privileged and includes a politics of empowering others. A leader seeks to give voice to everyone.
5. Jesus' leadership presents new boundaries for social relationships. Today's leader rejects stereotypes, breaks social boundaries and accepts diversity.
6. Jesus' leadership goes far beyond a religious renewal and includes a comprehensive and holistic reform of political, economic and social systems. All leadership today impacts society at large and must address critical issues in our contemporary world.

Leonard Doohan, *Spiritual Leadership The Quest for Integrity* (New York: Paulist Press. 2007)

LEADERSHIP IS EVERYONE'S VOCATION

Leadership is a concept we often resist. It seems immodest, even self-aggrandizing, to think of ourselves as leaders. But if it is true that we are made for community, then leadership is everyone's vocation, and it can be an evasion to insist that it is not. When we live in the close-knit ecosystem called community, everyone follows and everyone leads.

The power for authentic leadership, Vaclav Havel tells us, is found not in external arrangements but in the human heart. Authentic leaders in every setting – from families to nation-states – aim at liberating the heart, their own and others, so that its powers can liberate the world.

A leader is someone with the power to project either shadow or light upon some part of the world, and upon the lives of the people who dwell there. A leader shapes the ethos in which others must live, an ethos as light-filled as heaven or as shadowy as hell. A good leader has awareness of the interplay of inner shadow and light, lest the act of leadership do more harm than good.

Parker Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak: listening for the Voice of Vocation* (New York: Jossey-Bass. 1999)

SEARCHING FOR GOD'S VOICE

Fr Ron Rolheiser has written about the many voices that surround us everyday and the challenge to recognise God's voice within so many voices. He writes:

Jesus leaves us a wonderful metaphor to work with, but it's precisely only a metaphor: He tells us that he is the "Good Shepherd" and that his sheep will recognise his voice among all other voices. In sharing this metaphor, he is drawing upon a practice that was common among shepherds at the time: At night, for protection and

companionship, shepherds would put their flocks together into a common enclosure. They would then separate their sheep in the morning by using their voices. Each shepherd had trained his sheep to be attuned to his voice and his voice only.

How do we discern the unique cadence of God's voice? Which is the voice of the Good Shepherd?

- The voice of God is recognised both in whispers and in soft tones, even as it is recognised in thunder and in storm.
- The voice of God is recognised whenever one sees life, joy, health, colour and humour, even as it is recognised wherever one sees dying, suffering, poverty and beaten-down spirit.
- The voice of God is recognised in what calls us to humility, submergence into humanity, and in that which refuses to denigrate our humanity.
- The voice of God is recognised in what appears in our lives as "foreign", as other, as "stranger", even as it is recognised in the voice that beckons us home.
- The voice of God is the one that most challenges and stretches us, even as it the only voice that ultimately soothes and comforts us.



Maria Loughlin

- The voice of God enters our lives as the greatest of all powers, even as it forever lies in vulnerability, like a helpless babe in the straw.
- The voice of God is always heard in a privileged way in the poor, even as it beckons us through the voice of the artist and the intellectual.
- The voice of God is heard inside the gifts of the Holy Spirit, even as it invites us never to deny the complexities of our world and our own lives.
- The voice of God always invites us to live beyond all fear, even as it inspires holy fear.
- The voice of God is always heard wherever there is genuine enjoyment and gratitude, even as it asks us to deny ourselves, die to ourselves, and freely relativise all the things of this world.
- The voice of God, it would seem, is forever found in paradox.