

**Readings Acts 4: 8-12; 1 John 3: 1-2; John 10: 11-18**



**Fr Michael says:**

### The Good Shepherd

What a glorious calling each and all of us has received. The word “good” in Greek means caring, beautiful, protective with no limit, as opposed to the hireling, who runs away as soon as trouble comes. We are Shepherds to those around us, intimately in our families; as committed people to those around us and together journeying to the fullness of the Kingdom. Each and all of us, whilst shepherding ourselves, are shepherded also by Jesus, our only Saviour as the Acts remind us today. He does this by calling us His sisters and brothers and so identifying us as children of God His Father, as John puts in his first letter! He is so firmly committed to this calling that He is prepared to give His life for us. As we rejoice in who we are and who we are called to become, so do we live our calling fully and completely, in the richness of our human experience. It is a new Exodus, Bishop Francis puts it: “out of the closed inward-looking self towards its liberation through self-giving, and thus towards authentic self-discovery and indeed the discovery of God” (*Deus Caritas Est*, 6).

Caring is costly and risky – carers are very special people! Increasingly we hear of “burn out” and rightly so – but from where does it come? It is not so much from the work of caring itself; it is rather a sense of futility: we can work long hours if we feel appreciated, but if not; it soon drains us and becomes a drudge! I came to my awareness of the reality of who we are as “redeemed sinners” who need to forgive ourselves as all is forgiven in Christ’s gift of Himself to us through the Cross, in a year when I nearly had a breakdown and was empowered to realise I am Michael who is a priest, not a priest who is Michael and that I need to walk with people from where they are rather than where they should be: a process which takes time and does not always succeed! This realisation took me to a new level in recognising my true call. It is for this that I ask your prayers – to persevere and reach my Transfiguration moment – my 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Ordination next year with you.

This is what Jesus had in His life and He gives us the chance to recognise it in ours. As He said: “I have a food of which you know nothing. My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to complete His work!” (Jn 3 / 33 – 34): it is how He fulfils the mission of good shepherd. This does not make His life easier, it could even make it more difficult, because of how He feels and acts – His work nourishes Him! Love is a great source of energy and strength, making a person brave – no sacrifice is too great where love is present: our energy is endless! “Work is love made visible!” as Kahlil Gibran, a great spiritual writer from the Lebanon put it.