

Letter from Langdon Street

My dear people

One of the oldest paintings of Our Lord is in the Roman catacombs. It represents him with a sheep on his shoulders, a sheep that had got lost, taking it back to the safety of the sheepfold. Today's Gospel tells us that Our Lord is the Good Shepherd. Today is called Good Shepherd Sunday. Bishops and priests are called shepherds, in Latin pastor. The Church asks for special prayers for more shepherds to serve the Church. I am most grateful for all who contributed last Sunday to the Priests Training Fund. The fund will remain open until next Sunday.

Pope Francis is showing us a new kind of Church leadership. He has revised the criteria required when choosing new bishops, concentrating more on pastoral duties rather than administrative ones. He wants bishops to concentrate on preaching the Gospel, reaching out to the poor and disadvantaged rather than upholding outdated structures.

A few days ago in one of his homilies at his daily mass he reflected on the three elements necessary for an effective evangelization. He said that it requires docility, dialogue with people and trusting in the grace of God which is more important than bureaucracy. He was reflecting on a story in the Acts of the Apostles about Philip, one of the first deacons appointed to assist the apostles, who had been "distracted" from his normal duties. He said that those who are called to administer the sacraments must leave room for the grace of God and not place bureaucratic obstacles in the way. Philip left behind many things that he ought to have done. He left everything to speak to the Ethiopian official and explain to him the meaning of the Scriptures. The man received only a minimum of instruction about Our Lord and his Gospel. Philip did not fill in any forms or get permission from a higher authority. Pope Francis points out that when the Ethiopian was baptized, this placed him in the hands of God and of his grace. When he returned home to Ethiopia he would have told people of his encounter on the road to Gaza. He must have been the first person to preach the good news to the people of Ethiopia. Pope Francis concluded his homily by saying: "Let's think about these three moments of evangelization: the docility to evangelize, to do what God is requesting, secondly, a dialogue with the people – but during this dialogue, you begin from where these people come from – and thirdly, trusting in grace: Grace is more important than all the bureaucracy."

I remember an old parish priest telling me that three things are required of laypeople – they must pray, pay and obey. I don't think Pope Francis would agree with this. He wants bishops to enter into dialogue with those they have been sent to serve. He says we cannot share the Gospel without dialogue. Bishops and priests can no longer dictate to their people. They must learn to listen. Of course we must also learn to listen to what our bishops have to say. Pope Francis is not ordering his brother bishops how to carry out their ministry. By his own example he is showing them how to do it. He is very much dedicated to his ministry as a good shepherd, following the Master. He wants all church leaders to do the same.

"Listening" is a favourite word in St John's Gospel. It appears more than fifty times. St Benedict began his Rule with the word "listen." Today's reading explains how the sheep listen to the voice of the shepherd. We live in a world where many voices are raised by politicians, the media, celebrities, our own peer groups as well as church leaders. We are specially asked by Our Lord in the Gospel to listen carefully to the voice of our own good shepherd. We can hear it at mass, when we read the Bible, even when we are alone at prayer. We can hear it in the secret sanctuary of our own conscience when it directs us towards what is good and away

from what is evil. It is the voice of a shepherd who always speaks words of truth, words of love whose supreme desire is that we should "have life and have it to the full."

If I may briefly turn away from pray and obey, I would like to talk about pay. I am most grateful to you for your generous response to February's planned giving appeal. Many of the new standing orders commenced in April along with the new boxes of envelopes and it appears that the offertory and building fund contributions have increased in total by around 17% which is the equivalent of £8,000 in a full year. When gift aid is added this could be worth £10,000 per annum which will enable us to make further improvements to the Church buildings and grounds. Gift aid forms are available if anyone, who has not signed one, would like to do so.

Finally, for Good Shepherd Sunday, I could not resist including the photo of Pope Francis carrying a lamb on his shoulders, another good shepherd.

Yours sincerely



Parish Priest

FIRST HOLY COMMUNION

Next Saturday is a special day for some of the families in our parish. They have children who will make their First Holy Communion next Saturday morning at 11.00 am. Much of the seating will be taken up by the families and friends of the children but all are welcome to attend. Please pray for the children on their special day.

MISSION WITH A DIFFERENCE

As a follow up to our recent Parish Mission a number of activities have taken place. We have just concluded our reflections on prayer, using the DVD called Strength to Strength. The WOW ladies have met for a special lunch. Canon Berry hopes to talk about the different ministries in our parish and to invite volunteers. This will start today and continue for the next few Sundays.

FAITH MATTERS

There will be a Faith Matters Question Time at the Jesuit Church, Farm Street on Wednesday 4th June at 7:00pm. This will bring together Catholics and others from different walks of life and inviting them to respond to questions from the audience. The main topic will be: 'Pope Francis' Vision for the Church'. On the panel will be Lord Glasman of Stamford Hill, journalist and papal biographer Dr Austen Ivereigh, the poet and Catholic Voices campaigner Sarah de Nordwall, and Sarah Teather MP.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

17 May	First Communion Mass
7 June	Prayer Breakfast at St Peter & St Paul's Parish Church
22 June	Corpus Christi Procession after 10.30 mass
5 July	Prayer Breakfast at High Street Baptist Church
2 August	New Mill Baptist Church
6 September	St Martha's Methodist Church