

Be a Shepherd

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

(Mt 9:36–38, RSV)

The prayer for labourers has risen up to the Lord countless number of times over the centuries. Have you ever considered yourself an answer to the prayer?

Who is a shepherd?

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” “Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.” Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.” The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my sheep.”

(Jn 21:15–17, NIV)

The person who truly loves Jesus is the one who may be called upon to feed his lambs and tend his sheep. If you love Jesus, you may be asked to shepherd for him.

The flock he gives you may not be large. It may be no more than a few relatives or friends. It may be just one member in your family or among your co-workers and acquaintances. It may even be a stranger that you meet by chance.

Knowledge and discretion

Of course, as a shepherd you should strive to become thoroughly educated in the ways of the Lord. You must work hard to become well informed. You must study; you must develop into a qualified disciple. You must not make up your own theology from your limited understanding. You must learn procedures of discernment from experienced teachers. You have to choose the right words at the right moment. You have to be tactful, discreet, wise and loving.

You have to keep his commandments, and pray for guidance and help from the Holy Spirit. Jesus said: “If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever – the Spirit of truth.”

(Jn 14:15–17, NIV)

What are some things you might do?

1. Genuine caring

When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, *he had compassion on them*, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things. (Mk 6:34, NIV)

As in the quotation at the beginning of this chapter, we are told that the crowds were “like sheep without a shepherd.” In the first passage, Jesus asks for more labourers. Here he reveals how a shepherd feels and acts. “*He had compassion on them.*” His heart went out to them. He was moved with pity. He did not despise the people or hide from them, or make excuses to be rid of them. Even though he was very tired, he “began teaching them,” and he taught them “many things.”

We, too, can spend time with people who are lost for lack of direction. By kindness and understanding we can extend the comforting hand of Jesus to them. By showing our concern, we can spread his love and his good news.

By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. “This is a remote place,” they said, “and it’s already very late. Send the people away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.”

But he answered, “*You give them something to eat.*”
(Mk 6:35–37, NIV)

Don’t send the people away. Do something for them yourself. Without sinning or falling into temptation, do whatever you can, however little. In the above incident, when the disciples came forward with two fish and five loaves, Jesus built on their initiative and fed over five thousand people. You begin; Jesus will finish.

Youth prayer groups have been formed in many parishes throughout the world. The first steps towards organizing these were often taken by parents who saw the need for such spiritual gatherings for their sons and daughters. They did this voluntarily and without being ordered to do so. Now their young ones have a chance to know the joy of walking with the Lord. Now they have a trustworthy companion in Jesus. Now they do not spend their Saturday nights in undesirable places or with disreputable friends. These parents are examples of concerned shepherds.

The Rosary

Another illustration of shepherding can be seen here.

Many men and women, boys and girls, pray the Rosary, and fast on bread and water, for the conversion of unbelievers and sinners. Their prayers and sacrifices are noble and unselfish means of helping to save countless numbers of human beings from unnecessary and prolonged darkness and pain. This is caring. This is love. This is compassion.

The Good Shepherd

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hireling and not a shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hireling and cares nothing for the sheep.”
(Jn 10:11–13, RSV)

Be like Jesus. Do not run from the problem. Stay and help. Lay down your life for God’s people. The Holy Spirit is in you by virtue of the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation. Use his power and the courage which he has placed in you.

2. Speaking out

Picture the scene at the first Christmas.

In the countryside close by there were shepherds out in the fields keeping guard over their sheep during the watches of the night. An angel of the Lord stood over them and the glory of the Lord shone round them. They were terrified, but the angel said, “Do not be afraid. Look, I bring you news of great joy, a joy to be shared by the whole people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.”

(Lk 2:8–11, NJB)

When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” And they

went with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they saw it *they made known* the saying which had been told them concerning this child; and all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.

(Lk 2:15–18, RSV)

As for Mary, she treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart. (Lk 2:19, NJB)

The shepherds were simple peasants. Why would anyone believe that they saw angels in the middle of the night? Why would anybody believe that they carried “good news” from “angels”? Why would even one person take them seriously about the baby in the manger being the Christ for whom all of Israel was waiting? Yet, courageously, they spoke out. “*They made known*” the message. It made the Mother of God ponder in her heart. She “treasured” their words.

To bear witness for Jesus, you simply speak out. The angel’s announcement to the shepherds was, “Do not be afraid. Look, I bring you news of great joy, a joy to be shared by the whole people.” Do not fear. What you say about Jesus is joyful news. It is good news. It should be shared by all.

The Gospel

Moreover, do not just speak about Jesus. Tell them to carry out what he taught. He said,
“... and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you.” (Mt 28:20, NJB)

Not everyone will agree with what Jesus says. Not everyone will do all that he asks. But his words may make them wonder and think. Some may be influenced without your being aware of it.

Foul language

In Medjugorje, many homes used to display a poster which said, “U ovoj kući se ne psuje.” It means, “In this house do not swear.” This demonstrates a silent way of speaking out.

The elimination of foul language helps to control bad temper and anger, and diminishes one’s false sense of self-importance; it can promote gentleness and peace among fellow-workers and family members. It can help bring a Christian atmosphere to places where people come together.

In the Western world, it is not fashionable to place such signs in homes and offices. But if you will begin by not using vulgar expletives yourself, it might cause others to follow your example. Let peace begin with you. To live a certain way is to speak out for that way.

Don’t be shy

Never feel embarrassed by your loyalty to Jesus.

“For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of man also be ashamed, when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”
(Mk 8:38, RSV)

Make decisions in accordance with his teaching. Go off to pray even if others should ridicule you for it. Some days attend noon Mass instead of having lunch with your colleagues; take some friends with you. Acknowledge Jesus by hanging his portrait and crucifix in your home.

“He who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens; the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them.” (Jn 10:2–4, RSV)

By Baptism and Confirmation, by your love of Jesus and obedience to his commands, by your grounding in, and fidelity to, the teaching of the Church, you have entered through the gate that shepherds go through. You have the potential to be one of them. Develop that potential. A shepherd “leads them out” and “goes before them.” He is a guide, one who shows the way, one who walks in front. He starts things where there is a need.