

Reflection for 18th July 2021

With the schools breaking up next week, we enter the main summer holiday season, so the words that Jesus speaks to his disciples make a connection with what many must be thinking about. He tells them *'You must come away to some lonely place all by yourselves and rest for a while.'* Whilst it may not be possible to travel abroad or even to our favourite places, the emphasis, in the Gospel, seems to be on the apostles having some time for themselves so they are able to rest. The place is chosen with rest in mind, which for those with children and young people to cater for, does not necessarily mean inactivity but time for ourselves – which hopefully will include our favourite hobbies and sports. Perhaps we can find time for reflecting on life with one another – especially on those changes which have happened over the past year and those to come. So, I hope in one way or another, you and those close to you, are able to find that place of rest at some stage over the next couple of months. We can also see that our rest periods can go by very quickly as human need does not rest: *'But many people saw them going, and many could guess where; and from every town they all hurried to the place on foot and reached it before them.'* That is why it is important to be 'away' in mind, body and spirit for a while, in whatever way that's possible, because it will all still be here when we get back. But no one is left without a shepherd though because Jesus the Good Shepherd is constantly watching over us: *'So as he stepped ashore he saw a large crowd; and he took pity on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he set himself to teach them at some length.'*

I think this is the idea behind the religious idea of a *going on a retreat*, that by taking some time away from our usual duties we can both rest, have more time for our recreation and draw closer to God in Jesus. It is the idea that we need some time to deepen our appreciation of Jesus as our shepherd and finding that place of peace in him so that we are able to carry that sense with us when we are dealing with the daily round and the joys and sorrows of life. It is worth dwelling on the psalm if you have a few moments: *'The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.'* Our first reading from the prophet Jeremiah highlights the problem that the king was not shepherding the people properly and that had been true for all the kings that reigned whilst Jeremiah had been prophesying in the land. The kings had been and were corrupt. His hope for the institution of the monarchy is that there will be an 'ideal' king to lead the people. The prophecy is given in our reading: *'See, the days are coming – it is the Lord who speaks – when I will raise a victorious Branch for David, who will reign as a true king and be wise, practising honesty and integrity in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel dwell in confidence. And this is the name he will be called: The Lord-our-integrity.'*

Jesus is that king and shepherd, who as we see in the Gospel this week and next that he teaches and feeds the people in their need. When the holiday season comes to an end in the Autumn there will be much to face; the next stage of Covid, its consequences, climate change (in the light of COP 26) and racism (highlighted once again last Sunday). We talk about the Pope as being our shepherd and a pastor and he calls us to respond **together** to the needs of our time. In his Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti*, he says: *'It is true that religious ministers must not engage in the party politics that are the proper domain of the laity, but neither can they renounce the political dimension of life itself, which involves a constant attention to the common good and a concern for integral human development. The Church 'has a public role over and above her charitable and educational activities.' She works for 'the advancement of humanity and universal fraternity'. She does not claim to compete with earthly powers, but to offer herself as 'a family among families, that is the Church, open to bearing witness in today's world, open to faith, hope and love for the Lord and for those whom he loves with a preferential love.'* We are being called to take our part in Jesus' life as the Good Shepherd as we cannot face our challenges as a human race like sheep without a shepherd. God bless you, Canon David.