



Celebrating St Ignatius in July:

During the month of July we will be sharing a series of reflections on Ignatian Spirituality.

These reflections will be featured in the Parish Bulletin, the Parish Website and the Parish Facebook page. All contributions are welcome.

On Sunday August 3 we will be celebrating the Feast Day of St Ignatius with a special mass at 10.30am.

The Lord is my Shepherd

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I am in Wales, a place like New Zealand, where there are many sheep and many jokes about them. In this slowed down world I have the opportunity to observe what is happening around me. I listened last night to a story of shepherding in Palestine over 2000 years ago. Then sheep were mostly used for wool and less for meat, so the shepherd would have a long relationship with his animals and so tend them carefully. Shepherding was seen as a 'calling', not a job. The sheep knew their shepherd and the sound of his voice, and he knew each of his sheep to call them by name or whistle. At night the shepherd may pen his sheep, sleeping across the opening to protect them from predators.

I was chatting with a shepherd in Wales when I was out walking, I had seen one of his sheep lying very still, and he said he was going up to get him and take him home. I expected this mean that he was culling him, but no, he was taking his sick animal home so that he could better care for it. I was and moved, but surprised by my own colouring, how often do our own experiences 'make up' reality around us.

And all of this is a long way from farming in Australia today!

Even so, in the early morning hours today I watched cows being pushed from one place to another, a dog was herding them and the farmer was on a motorised bike pushing them along. From the place where I sat and watched I could feel the fear, the blindness of the cows.

So these shepherds from long ago Palestine were a very different story to those of today. How different then that the sheep were called to the shepherd, they were not pushed from behind, herded by yapping dogs and mechanised men, going blindly, but instead led by the shepherd. The sheep would follow responding to their shepherd.

Today we go blind, groping forward, pushed away from what we don't want. We can easily stay blind, for what can we rely on to lead us? Do we know what to trust, how to choose well, how to be moved and the follow what calls us? Mostly we are pushed from: from fears of not having enough: to wanting to belong, but not being truly ourselves in case we stand out with values that are countercultural. Our health is seen as not being sick, it is a body thing, but rarely do understand that health is a flourishing of our emotional, spiritual and mental faculties.

We are part of a fast moving pack, but not necessarily a pack that we feel part of.

So what leads us, what draws our heart and our trust? Of course sheep get bad press, who wants to be a sheep?

The idea of recognising a voice and going because we trust, having someone lay down their own safety to keep us safe is probably not something most of us are familiar with. To be able to trust is a deep desire, as is to be worthy of trust. These are really old fashioned ideas, yet if I pick over my life trust is what has led me inwards and also outwards, being safe firstly and then learning to trust. The shell of 'she'll be right mate' or 'no I am fine' is a ruse of independence, a protection of the soft underbelly.

Yet each of us knows, we are always looking for something, this is the way we are wired, we are alive and we desire aliveness as we feel ourselves forward in the hope of love and safety.

However we are not sheep and we do not live in Palestine and our culture has shaped us in a particular way. We are shaped to be independent, to think for ourselves, to provide many choices from which to choose, to expect things to stop working, to need to replace everything we own, even our relationships. We expect stimulation and entertainment, and to be free to choose as a sign of our freedom at each step of the way.

But the sheep hear only one voice, someone prepared to lay down their life for them, someone who will take them to places where they can graze. I imagine these sheep to be calm, not with the adrenalin pulsing through their systems which we are used to! What gives us any tranquillity and a settled peaceful mind which dares to hope? Are these values we care about any more? Can we imagine that these can exist for us?

Perhaps thinking about the values that bring justice to our lives and those around us are like a voice that calls and will us lead us, orientate and direct our decision-making, and importantly make us think more courageously about this gift of our lives. How will we honour it? Is there anything we would lay our life down for?