

Shepherds for Christ

Saints Peter and Paul, Apostles

Prepare: Read Matt 16:13-19

The Gospel reading for the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul (June 29) describes the holy quality of "shepherding" that's required for Christian leadership – in the priesthood, lay ministers, parents, i.e., any type of Christian leadership.

Here, St. Peter is being gifted with the insight to recognize Jesus as the Messiah. Then he's called and commissioned to shepherd others into the same realization.

In Christianity, everyone is called to evangelize, i.e., to shepherd others closer to Christ. It's our primary mission as we follow Jesus and continue the work he began. Parents have been commissioned by Christ to shepherd their families. Teachers have been commissioned to shepherd their students. Employers have been commissioned to shepherd those who work under them. Secretaries have been commissioned to shepherd the people they deal with on the phone.

However, the responsibility is most significant when one is also called to leadership. Not only are leaders called to examples to those we lead, but when we are in charge of meetings, or we direct clubs or choirs or religious education classes, or we hold positions of authority in parish or diocesan ministries, we have been given vehicles for the mission.

All leaders – clergy and laity, religious and secular – are called to lead others to Christ by imitating Christ within our particular areas of responsibility (the pastures where we shepherd).



And we do this by imitating Christ's style of shepherding.

In today's second reading, we're reminded that St. Paul suffered in his shepherd's ministry, like Jesus did and like we do if we're involved enough to really make a difference for the kingdom of God. The good news is that the strongholds of evil ("the gates of the netherworld") cannot prevail against our Christ-inspired efforts to seek

the lost and bring them to God. Jesus destroyed the locks on these gates when he conquered sin and death.

The "gates" are the escape route from Satan's prison. Those who are enslaved to sinful lifestyles and the devil's deceptions are waiting to be shepherded out of darkness into the safe pastures of unconditional love, forgiveness, and the saving power of God. We cannot drag them out, but we can throw open the gates and show them the way out and pray that they will recognize the escape opportunity.

A Christian leader who does not go into Satan's territory to rescue lost souls nor protects his flock from wandering into danger is no follower of Christ, because this was Christ's entire mission.

You are Christ's representative to the flock he has given you, using the gifts and talents that the Father has given you and your baptismal in-filling of his Holy Spirit, your apostolic calling from Christ, and yes, even your sufferings. We are all apostles sent into the world to spread the Good News. We are all shepherds being led by Jesus as we lead others to him.