

-Week 4-

*Allowing the Soul to be Shepherded:
Setting Aside Our Own Mental Framework*



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Last week, we explored “The Gift of Baptism: Receiving God’s Grace,” which invited us to ponder the sacrament of baptism as calling. We were also invited to reminisce about our personal memories of baptism and pray with the baptism of Jesus. Continuing into this fourth week of our Benedictine Volunteers 20-weeks Vocational Discernment Series inspired by the Synod of Bishops’ “Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment” Preparatory Document, we explore “Allowing the Soul to be Shepherded: Setting Aside Our Own Mental Framework.” In our exploring together the nature of calling—how it appears and how it is given—let us further ponder the ways calling can be received. Particularly, let us ponder the image of the shepherd and his flock as a metaphor for one way of relationship that helps us to freely open our hearts to God’s voice and let go of attachments that may inhibit us from engaging authentically with calling.

Scripture offers us again and again images of Jesus as shepherd and we, his flock. The shepherd is a special kind of leader. He is a leader that guides and protects his flock. He is also a guardian that watches over, gathers, and feeds his sheep. The flock, too, is a special kind of group. It is a group of animals that desires to be fed so that it can produce materials such as milk, cheese, and wool. Together, the shepherd and his flock learn the way of leading and following together. The dynamic of this leading and following relationship is very unique as it requires an open posture of vulnerability and trust. The shepherd must learn the ways and culture of the sheep. The flock must choose to be led and to follow freely because it sees goodness in the shepherd. Over time, this bond increases and deepens, resulting in a natural relationship of mutuality. Similarly, in our own personal experiences of call, we must first choose to be led before we can follow from the heart.

In order to be led and follow from the heart, we must be willing to throw away the things we have attachments to. Matthew illustrates the parable of a rich young man who approaches Jesus with a request to enter heaven. Jesus says to him, “If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to [the] poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me” (Mt 19:21). In order to receive the desires of his heart, the young man is asked to let go of his attachment to his personal belongings. For us in our own lives, these ‘riches’ may appear in a variety of forms—things, people, places, ideas. Jesus’ invitation to sell what we have and come follow him can be understood as an invitation to set aside our own mental framework of how we think God ‘should’ answer our desires. These ‘should’ desire may lie in our own personal preferences, the opinions of those around us, and/or the cultural norms of the society we live in. Consciously or subconsciously, when we pre-determine the path, we give power to these ‘should’ voices. To enter the mystery of

God's calling with an open heart, we must first abandon our attachment to any perception, judgment, and preconceived idea about how and where we might expect calling 'should' appear in our lives. Then, we can begin to engage authentically and freely with the mystery of how God speaks to each of us uniquely. We can then be like the sheep that choose to be led by a shepherd whose love and care is wider and deeper than the whole flock could ever know.

Questions for Reflection:

- Spend some time prayerfully with the parable of the rich young man in Matthew 19:16-22 and also, Mark 10:17-31 and Luke 18:18-30. What feelings do you sense in the young man? In Jesus? What correlations do you observe in your own life?
- Recall some of the roadblocks or resistances (i.e. personal, familial, cultural, and societal) you identified in Week 2. How have these frameworks shaped you and influenced your journey? How have these frameworks helped and/or hinder you?
- What in your life are you being asked to 'let go' of in order to receive? What has been challenging in this letting go?