

What comes to mind when you hear the word, **Parish**? Regular Mass-goers talk about “our parish,” while others who are connected in some way might say, “the parish.” People who aren’t connected in any way possibly have no understanding at all of the word, **parish**, or its meaning. In a technical sense, though, a **parish** is simply “a portion of the people of God”– and in that sense, it **encompasses all** who live within the parish boundaries. This parish, in which most of us live, extends from the Mooloolah River to the north, down to Wildhorse Mountain in the south, and west, up past Maleny. There are over 130,000 people who live within Our Lady of the Rosary Catholic Parish. Why is this relevant for Good Shepherd Sunday? Because the purpose of a parish isn’t to be a service-provider, but to be a community of followers of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who make **new** followers of Jesus.

To help us understand our place in **this** parish, I’d like to talk about two different types of animals that appear in the Bible as similes for human beings: fish and sheep. At different points in our lives, we are all like fish; we have our community of people around us with whom we fit in, and who are like us; in that community, we **do** what we want and **go** where we want, because we have no leader to follow.

Parishes exist to catch fish and turn them into sheep who follow Jesus, the Good Shepherd. In Matthew chapter 13:47, Jesus says that “the Kingdom of Heaven” – or for our purposes, the parish – “is like a fishing net that was let down into the water and caught fish of every kind.” In that sense, people who decide to follow Jesus are taught by Him how to fish for people – as Jesus himself says in Matthew and Mark’s Gospels, “Follow me and I will teach you to fish for people.”

Now, I don’t know about you but being **like** a sleek fish who swims fast, hunting for food, sounds much more attractive than being **like** a woolly old sheep who stands round eating grass all day long. This is where the simile breaks down because it’s got nothing to do with **what we prefer** and everything to do with allowing the imagery to speak to us and examine where

we are in our Christian journey – in comparison with where Jesus is calling us to be.

Here, today, in the congregation, we have fish who've allowed themselves to be caught – perhaps even little fish who have no choice in the matter. We have sheep who are trying to follow the Good Shepherd, but who have no idea what His voice sounds like; we have sheep who are learning to know Jesus' voice'; shepherds who feed the flock – priests and lay people – through their gifts of leadership; and even fishers of people who have been called to go out and cast the nets.

These are all progressions along the Christian journey: fish, who become sheep – or followers of Jesus, some of whom are called to become shepherds of the sheep – and fishers of people, which is a task given to all the baptised. Where do you see yourself? Where, how and in what ways is the Good Shepherd calling you? Because He is most definitely calling you – whether you hear His call in your life **yet** or not.

At all Masses in the parish this weekend, young people are being formally enrolled in the Sacramental Program for Confirmation. This Sacrament is an essential element of initiation in a Catholic Parish that helps a person grow from being a **fish** into a **sheep**. In Queensland, Confirmation is celebrated as early as 7 years old because this is when the age of reason commences – the age when a child **begins** to develop the capacity to consciously become a follower of Jesus who makes other followers of Jesus. Please pray for our candidates, that through the journey ahead, they may experience the desire to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd and follow Him in their lives. In that prayer, let's also pray to the Lord for ourselves, that we may hear gentle whisper of Jesus' voice and so experience **life to the full** as sheep who know the sound of Jesus' voice, shepherds who nourish the sheep, and fishers of people who make new followers of Jesus, the Good Shepherd. Amen.