

PBS MASS, 2ND AFTER EASTER 2020.

Of the many books on my shelf, there is one, which is part of a series that is titled "How To Understand God". What a marvellously presumptive title! Through a series of Chapters, on the Philosophical approach, the Scientific approach, Proofs, Mystery and Myth, there is a feeling that once the book has been read and digested the reader can walk away and can claim "Ah! Now i understand God!"

Forgive my flippancy! The quest is a noble one. Ever since humanity became conscious of his existence and felt that he was part of something bigger and deeper, the search for God is a constant. But we must be careful not to put too much emphasis on our own abilities to seek out God. It is very much part of our understanding of God, that He comes in search of us. This characteristic of God is part of the fabric of the Judao-Christian tradition. The Hebrew Scriptures, what we know as the Old Testament pictured God as a Shepherd with the people as very much part of the sheepfold where they were kept safe and sheltered and nourished. Think of the psalmists words as the Lord being his shepherd, or the prophet Isaiah describing how God will feed his flock like a shepherd. There are echoes of King David the shepherd boy who became the shepherd of Israel, and on a negative note there are the words of another prophet Ezekiel and his warnings about those who call themselves shepherds but have little regard for their flock.

This is all part of the DNA of Jesus. Not only would Jesus have known his scriptures and the importance of the image of the caring and dutiful shepherd, he was the shepherd that his scriptures talked about. We know that God became flesh in Jesus Christ, God the shepherd became Jesus the shepherd. For if you want to begin to understand God, then look to Jesus and understand Him. Jesus is the Key to what God is like. I am the good shepherd says Jesus, and the good shepherd does not rest until his flock is safe in his care, until every member of his flock is brought home safely, until every member of his flock is known to be loved and under his caring gaze.

For St John, this was a very special aspect of his understanding of the person of Jesus which is why most of chapter 10 is given to this important observation and crucial retelling of Jesus' words. But John adds one other aspect to the

shepherd identity. This shepherd will sacrifice himself for love of his flock, even the ones that wander off. So if you want to understand God, think of Jesus the shepherd and let your seeking for understanding be the development of true faith.

AMEN.