In the first reading, Isaiah is sent to denounce Shebna, the self-serving treasurer of good King Hezekiah. The prophet pronounces that Eliakim, an honorable and generous man, will replace him as steward and so be entrusted with the "keys of the house of David" *(the first time the phrase is mentioned in the Old Testament)*. Such is the role of the prophet, to speak truth to power, to remind the leadership of what power is FOR -- not self-aggrandizement but self-emptying service, ultimately to bring home the lost and make the many one.

Jesus builds on this teaching. He gives Peter a leadership position, putting into his hands the "keys of the kingdom". He does this not that Peter might lord it over his fellow disciples, let alone the larger believing community, but rather *(as John reports in an appearance after the Resurrection)* this leader of the twelve is told to "feed my sheep". In our language, he is called to be a pastor *(a word which comes from the Latin for shepherd)*.

William Barclay once suggested that the biblical understanding of leadership/ authority/ power is best captured in the image of the "shepherd's staff." As it has three parts so, he proposes, shepherds have three functions.

First, there is the shaft itself, which enables the shepherd to nudge and so guide the flock to pasture. In the believing community. The primary task of a leader is to show us the way, to urge us forward, in the final analysis to bring us back to the one WHO IS "the Way, the Truth and the Life." Our pastors would lead us to the Master who, like the prodigal father in Luke's parable, is always waiting for us to come home.

The second part of the staff is the hook at the top. Israel was a dry hilly land, with lots of crevices into which the lambs could easily fall. The shepherd *(inverting his staff and then using its hook)* was to rescue the fallen sheep. In short, the "power" entrusted to our leaders is never to put people down but to lift them up. Pope Francis calls this "the ministry of mercy."

Finally, there is the base of the shepherd's staff, which symbolized the need to challenge the wolf. "The hireling runs away when the wolf appears, but the good shepherd will lay down his life for the sheep." Thus, the third duty of leadership is to defend the vulnerable -- the widow and orphan, the outcast and stranger, the marginalized whom the good pastor will always seek out and STAND WITH. In our own day, again as Francis keeps reminding us, that especially means standing with refugees and immigrants.

Final thought. This "shepherding" is surely not just the work of the clergy. It is task of all of the baptized -- be it in our families, our neighborhoods, our workplaces, our church, our
land. Nourished by the Word and fed at the Table, we would bring to others some of the goodness given to us. That the Kingdom might come just a little more this day.

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