



What if we had a sure and certain hope...

Just before Christmas, Pope Francis suggested a change to one line in the Lord's Prayer.

Of course, the press thought this was sensational, but the story died down after a day or two. He proposed "Let us not fall into temptation" (instead of "Lead us not into..."). It's not a credible translation of the Bible's original (greek) phrase, but we can understand his point can't we? Speaking to Italian TV, the pontiff said we should prefer "do not let me fall into temptation because it is I who fall, it is not God who throws me into temptation and then sees how I fell... A father does not do that, a father helps you to get up immediately."

It's a tricky matter, but at the beginning of a New Year, it does get us thinking about who (or what) leads us into 2018.

With wars and terror, disease and refugee camps as much in evidence around the world as ever, with the uncertainties surrounding Brexit still filling our nightly news, with so little clear and sure, many will be led by fear as another January comes around. That affects how we think about the future just as much as how we behave in the present.

Of course, in this season of New Year's Resolutions, many will be led by the hope

that this year will be the year we get it right. Whatever 'it' might be – health, diet and exercise regime, relationships, prayer-life or bible reading... Again, that affects our immediate behaviour and how we think about the future – only we're all too aware that it's rarely long before that 'future' turns into a sense of guilt and failure as once again our determination fails and the resolutions are broken!

What if we had a sure and certain hope, as another New Year dawns? What if we had someone to follow, someone who has proved he won't fail us?

Using the image of a sheep-fold with a narrow gate, Jesus speaks of himself as the 'Good Shepherd': "the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out."

This shepherd provides safety and security, pasture and protection for all of his sheep – even calling them by name in a voice they recognise and understand. Even more than that, it's a promise of a leader who doesn't fail – a few verses later: "The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."

Do we want to enter 2018 filled with hope? Full of confidence that we'll be known, kept and loved by one who has even given his life (though he couldn't stay dead) to 'guarantee' his flock?

Why not read chapter 10 of John's gospel – and be led this year by Jesus himself?

In Christ, James