

26th November 2023

Leaning

"I'll share your load if you just call on me."

Bill Withers, *Lean on Me*

As a young minister, I attended the installation of a new priest in the parish's Catholic church, presided over by the redoubtable Cardinal Gordon Gray, the first Scottish Cardinal since the Reformation. As we were robing in the Sacristy, a young priest was taking the Cardinal's crozier out of its case. It was in three sections, and when they were fitted together I commented to the Cardinal that this was a fine piece of silver-work. "Aye, that's as maybe," the craggy old cleric replied, "but it's also extremely useful to lean on if the Mass goes on for too long ..."

Even a Cardinal, it seemed, needed something to lean on when it was necessary. I've never had a crozier, but I know how important it is to have *people* to lean on, and I appreciate the privilege I've had of people needing to lean on me over the years.

Lean on Me is a 1972 song by American singer-songwriter, Bill Withers. It was a number one hit for him, and it's been recorded successfully by many others. Withers was brought up in a small, coal-mining town in West Virginia. When he moved to Los Angeles, he missed the community bonds of his hometown. *Lean on Me* was the outworking of his feelings and put into words and music a universal theme. Not one of us, from an old Cardinal to Bill Withers, is strong enough to stand upright by ourselves all the time. We *all* need people to lean on.

The song contains these simple but powerful lyrics.

*You just call on me brother when you need a hand.
We all need somebody to lean on.
I just might have a problem that you'll understand.
We all need somebody to lean on.
Lean on me when you're not strong,
And I'll be your friend; I'll help you carry on ...*

If it's you that's to be leant on today, I hope you have the strength of a crozier to do your job. And if you need to do the leaning, I hope you have the right brother or sister to lean on. That way, we can all help each other to "carry on" – and not only if the Mass is too long!

A prayer for today

Easy prayer this time ... Lord, I need to lean on you for a bit. Amen