Characteristics of a Christian Leader

St. Bonaventure wrote a very practical work on spiritual leadership in the 13th. century. He was the organizer who assisted St. Francis and gave order and structure to the Franciscan order. In this work he describes six qualities of a spiritual leader:

Zeal for righteousness. Moral sensitivity to anything unjust in himself (first) or others. Highlights the importance of purity.

Compassion. This should be demonstrated to those who are facing both physical and spiritual weaknesses. Today Bonaventure would describe this aspect as being a servant to those in need.

Patience. Bonaventure reminds leaders of the critical need for patience due to at least three reasons; leadership is exhausting and demanding work, there is little apparent return for all the efforts a leader makes, and many who are on the receiving end are ungrateful.

Good example. Leaders are models that other people look to and follow their example, therefore, make it good! The leader is no better than the followers and Bonaventure stresses humility and maturity.

Good judgment or discernment. This guides the leader in knowing both what to do and how to do it. In relationship to this he addresses how to encourage the spiritual and moral growth of the community. He also reminds his readers of the need for delegation and the danger of becoming buried under the heavy load of administration.

Devotion to God. While listed last, this is the most important quality because everything else depends upon it. A close personal relationship with God guides us in all our leadership responsibilities. Here Bonaventure mentions the need for public and private prayer and cultivating an awareness or mindfulness of God in all of life.