

Cycle B 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading 1, Jer 23:1-6

Woe to the shepherds who mislead and scatter the flock of my pasture, says the LORD. Therefore, thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, against the shepherds who shepherd my people: You have scattered my sheep and driven them away. You have not cared for them, but I will take care to punish your evil deeds. I myself will gather the remnant of my flock from all the lands to which I have driven them and bring them back to their meadow; there they shall increase and multiply. I will appoint shepherds for them who will shepherd them so that they need no longer fear and tremble; and none shall be missing, says the LORD. Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up a righteous shoot to David; as king he shall reign and govern wisely, he shall do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah shall be saved, Israel shall dwell in security. This is the name they give him: "The LORD our justice."

Responsorial Psalm, Ps 23:1-3, 3-4, 5, 6

R. (1) The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. In verdant pastures he gives me repose; beside restful waters he leads me; he refreshes my soul.

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

He guides me in right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk in the dark valley I fear no evil; for you are at my side with your rod and your staff that give me courage.

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

You spread the table before me in the sight of my foes; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

Only goodness and kindness follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD for years to come.

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

Reading II, Eph 2:13-18

Brothers and sisters: In Christ Jesus you who once were far off have become near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, he who made both one and broke down the dividing wall of enmity, through his flesh, abolishing the law with its commandments and legal claims, that he might create in himself one new person in place of the two, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile both with God, in one body, through the cross, putting that enmity to death by it. He came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near, for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

Gospel, Mk 6:30-34

The apostles gathered together with Jesus and reported all they had done and taught. He said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while." People were coming and going in great numbers, and they had no opportunity even to eat. So they went off in the boat by themselves to a deserted place. People saw them leaving and many came to know about it. They hastened there on foot from all the towns and arrived at the place before them. When he disembarked and saw the vast crowd, his heart was moved with pity for them, for they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.

Today's readings are all about shepherds. We heard in the 1st reading about what God promises will happen when bad shepherds scatter their flocks. The 2nd reading told us about how our good shepherd Jesus brings peace across a divided mankind. God loves us so much that He includes all of humanity in His plan by calling everyone to a life of being holy shepherds... leading others to Christ through the outpouring of God's love for everyone. No one is excluded.

This week's readings prompted me to think about a great shepherd of the Church, Pope John XXIII, who less than 3 months after being elected, shocked many when he created the Second Vatican Council, Vatican II, in 1959. The more I learn about him, the more I am in awe. To the world at large, Pope John in 4 short years gave what neither educators, nor political leaders, nor even the Church ever provided: a sense of unity across the human family. I remember Pope John XXIII as a young teenager even though I was far from the Catholic Church; I was a Protestant at the time, an EUB (an Evangelical United Brethren). *"Prior to Pope John, the Catholic church was seen almost as a fortress, very much concerned about its own internal stability and integrity, and engaging the world through missionary activity. Pope John wanted to reinforce that missionary mandate, but he also wanted to create an environment of dialogue, where the church would engage with all the forces of the modern world... Vatican II facilitated Catholics to pray with other Christian denominations, encouraged friendship with other non-Christian faiths, and opened the door for languages besides Latin to be used during Mass. Many other new positions such as in education, the media and divine revelation were also developed."*

In today's 2nd reading we see the sense that is the core of our Christian tradition: *"In Christ Jesus you who once were far off have become near"*.... God lives in history and invites all of us, the family of humanity, to help him with it. If His invitation goes begging in a world besieged by life-threatening danger and seduced by our own selfishness, we Christians must share the blame. But, Pope John XXIII believed that mankind will be saved where we are, not where we ought to be. Vatican II brought the Church, and in fact the whole Christian community, together for a new conversation with the world, and to treat the wounds that have torn apart the church for centuries. And now our shepherd Pope Francis continues that work helping the world to recapture the sense of unity of all through a vision of a synod church that

involves everyone and is close to the world's wounds. Jesus died for everyone's sins, not just for a chosen few.

Vatican II also helped the Catholic Church rediscover the encounter with the Risen Christ every day in our lives....He is in us and we are in Him. This shattered nearly 1000 years of teaching and practice based on the notion that there were 2 classes of people in the Church, laypeople and the ordained. While the last 60 years has seen a decline in the priesthood and religious, lay contribution as shepherds in the Church has exploded with great numbers of us serving as religious educators, pastoral care givers, canon lawyers, parish administrators and most importantly, millions of us not only participating in ministries, but being the very body of Christ to people in need!

Today's Gospel shows us how hungry and desperate people are for a relationship with God, and shows how we should respond when we encounter these people. Jesus welcomed back the Twelve Apostles. He had sent them out two by two to be shepherds preaching repentance, driving out demons, and curing the sick. And Jesus, like any of us would, wants to have a reunion with them, a special gathering, just himself and his closest companions. He says to them, "*Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.*" Jesus is looking forward to a pleasant evening of eating and laughing and storytelling with his friends.

However, that's not what happens is it? They get in a boat and ride off to find a quiet beach, just for a few hours, just for a simple meal. But their plans are spoiled. A huge crowd had replaced a small get-together. And the crowd is not there to cheer Jesus. No, they were people with problems, people with sin and sickness, loneliness and grief, and they had come to Christ, in search of a shepherd, in need of a teacher.

How does the Lord respond? Jesus doesn't think about his own needs; He expresses no regret; He doesn't turn to his Apostles and roll his eyes. Instead, the Gospel tells us: "*When he disembarked and saw the vast crowd, his heart was moved with pity for them, for they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.*" Without pause, He began

to work for the salvation of the crowd, these sheep without a shepherd, these students without a teacher. It wasn't what he planned to do. But he did it anyway.

Who among us here will drive out demons or cure the sick in the name of Jesus? Probably no one. Who of us will die for the sake of Christ's name? Again, probably no one. But, who of us will meet the unexpected person with a problem or an unplanned guest? We all will! In fact, we can count on it!

Today Christ says to us quite simply: *"When you meet a person in need, that is your moment to respond to Me, Jesus. Not performing miracles, not suffering death for Me, but responding to that man or woman who needs help and support...that someone who needs a shepherd...even if they are going to ruin your plans."* That is our moment to respond to our shepherd by becoming shepherds ourselves. With the help of the Holy Spirit we can become shepherds...As St. Augustine so forcefully said, *"So be a member of the Body of Christ...Be what you can see [in the Eucharistic], and receive what you are."* In other words, be the Body of Christ for those people to encounter. It may seem like such a small thing, sometimes a minor aggravation even, definitely not the stuff of saints. But the Lord is clear: He will meet us where we are, and that is where He wants us to respond as His body.

We all have families, we meet Christ in them, and there we are the Body of Christ for them.

Wherever we are, if someone upsets us, there we meet Christ and there we are the Body of Christ for them.

And when we meet someone in need, there we meet Christ, and there we are the Body of Christ for them.

You know Jesus only told us once at the Last Supper that He would be present in the Bread and Wine, but He tells us repeatedly in all the Gospels that He is always present in the poor and afflicted. It is Christ who has sought us out in those unexpected people that we meet. It is Christ Himself who appears to us in the needy.