

Lord, Give us good shepherds in our church

Lectio Divina of the Sixteenth Sunday B

Opening prayer: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Lord, You are our shepherd so we will lack nothing. You restore our soul! You lead us on the right path because it is Your nature to do so. Even though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we will not fear because You are with us. We thank You for equipping us with Your rod and Your staff so that we can be comforted. You anoint our head with oil and ensure that our cup runs over with abundance! Thank You for this evening to think of your goodness and mercies all the days of my life and bless us, our shepherds of the church that we may be a committed and witnessing church. Amen!

First reading: A reading from the book of Prophet Jeremiah 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.”

(The Word of the Lord/Thanks be to God).

Commentary: The prophet Jeremiah thunders against Israel’s careless leaders – the king, some priests and some court prophets – because they have shown no concern for the poor but had an alliance with Egypt. During the time of prophet Jeremiah, there were four bad and irresponsible shepherds (kings- Shallum, Jehoiakim, Jeconiah, and Zedekiah) who destroyed and scattered the sheep. They set very bad examples to the people by leading them to idolatry and other sins. As a result of their irresponsible leadership, prophet Jeremiah warned the people of Judah of their imminent punishment and at the same time, prophesying them that a righteous king will come in the line of David to lead the people in justice. His prophecy took place in the person of our Lord Jesus who came as the good shepherd who manifested his good shepherding role both in words and action.

Responsorial psalm 23: 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.

**Second reading: A Reading from the letter of St. Paul to the Ephesians
1:3-14**

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.

(The Word of the Lord/ Thanks be to God)

Commentary: St. Paul explains how Christ has brought about reconciliation between ancient enemies, the Jews and the Gentiles. Paul says that the Jews had been “near” and the Gentiles “far off.” But by becoming Christians, those Jews, who had enjoyed God’s favor for so many generations, have now accepted Christ as the Messiah. The converted Gentiles had long been estranged from God in their worship of pagan gods, but they, too, have now accepted Christ as their Lord and Savior. Hence, as Christians, the Jewish converts and the Gentile converts are no more enemies but brothers and sisters, one in Christ. The Law of Moses “*with its commandments and legal claims*” was serving to separate the Jewish converts who kept it from the Gentiles who didn’t know of it and didn’t. Against the attempts by some Jewish Christians to impose the Mosaic Law on Gentile converts, Paul affirms that the Law could no longer separate God’s single people into factions.

Gospel reading: A reading from the Holy Gospel according to St. Mark 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.

(The Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ/ Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ).

Meditation: Today’s Gospel passage presents the sympathetic and merciful heart of Jesus who lovingly invites the apostles to a desolate place for some rest. Jesus had sent his apostles to heal, teach and preach areas of his going. When they returned, they were no doubt thrilled by the experience of witnessing at first hand the power of God’s Word through their words and the works of their hands done in Jesus’ Name. Nonetheless, they were hungry, exhausted, and in need of rest, both physical and spiritual. In fact, Jesus was eager to hear about their missionary adventures as they proudly shared their experiences. But Jesus, too, was in need of a break from the crowds who were constantly pressing in, demanding attention and healing. Hence, he led the Apostles by boat to a “deserted place” on the other side of the Lake intending to give them all a period of rest and sharing.

Sheep without shepherd: But when they came ashore there was a large crowd waiting for them. Jesus’ heart was moved with pity for those people who were “sheep without a shepherd in the desert who might experience hunger, thirst and other danger. This text affirms Jesus’ extraordinary availability and his compassion for the needy. Jesus was a great and compassionate shepherd who knows the sheep, teaches the sheep, guides the sheep and protects the sheep from the dangers.

The Church needs ideal pastors: The pastor must be a man of compassion. He must be able to feel deeply the suffering of others, to understand why they fear and tremble. Pastors are also called to lead and “govern wisely” (Jer 23:5), living the teaching they communicate. They are to guide people in right paths and are to be concerned about what is right and just. Their pastoral care should be involved with the people’s needs, spiritual and material. There are very many people searching for truth today, people hungering for instruction, good people who are looking for direction. They need ideal pastors who have the smell of the sheep, getting away from clericalism to walk with the lives of the people who struggle with grief, sickness, doubts, anxiety, depression and the evils of the modern cultures.

Jesus the good Shepherd: Who is a shepherd? A shepherd is the one who leads, feeds, nurtures, comforts, corrects, and protects his flock. In the Old Testament, the image of the Shepherd is often applied to God as well as to the leaders of the people. The book of Exodus represents Yahweh several times as a shepherd. The prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel compare Yahweh's care and protection of His people to that of a shepherd. We read in Is 40:11 "*He is like a shepherd feeding his flock, gathering lambs in his arms, holding them against His breast and leading the mother ewes to their rest*" Jesus says in John 10 "*I know my sheep and they know me. I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also*" As a good shepherd, Jesus fed the people physically, socially and spiritually. When he saw the sheep without shepherd, his heart was moved with pity for them. He gave his life for his sheep on the cross.

Are we good shepherds or bad shepherds? We are called to be good shepherds. We are all shepherds because we are all entrusted with some responsibility at home, in our work place and in the parish community, exercising different ministry. Therefore we as pastors and you as parents, teachers, doctors, nurses, government officials and any other responsibility you may hold, are expected to be good shepherds to those who are entrusted to your care. We become good shepherds by loving the ones who are entrusted to us, by praying for them, by spending our time and talents for their welfare, and by guarding them from physical and spiritual dangers. Parents must be especially careful of their duties by giving their children good example through their exemplary Christian life.

How you can become a good sheep of the parish community? Your pastors are your shepherds, helpers and spiritual leaders in your spiritual and pastoral needs. As a good sheep of the community, you are expected to hear and follow the voice of your shepherds through their homilies in the Holy Mass, RCIA, Bible classes, Sacraments, spiritual counseling. You are also expected to cooperate with the pastors by giving them concrete suggestions for the welfare of the parish, by encouraging them in their duties, by lovingly offering them constructive criticism when they fail in their duties and above all by praying for them daily so that they may lead an edifying life.

Concluding prayer: Jesus our Good Shepherd, watch over us today in all we face and experience. Never leave us or forsake us and journey with us always. You know us as no one else knows us. Guard us and keep us, As you guard and keep those whom we love. We pray for the sick and the lonely; For the anxious and the bereaved; for those whose pain is beyond our comprehension. We stand with them and commend them to your care. Lord in your mercy, Hear our prayer. Good Shepherd, we pray for the carers in hospitals and in homes and for all who serve the needs of others. May the example of your loving compassion inspire us in our care for others. You know us by our name and our identity is not hidden from you. Gather us to yourself as a shepherd gathers the sheep, that we might know your Name. We pray in your most powerful and holy name. Amen (Hail Mary/ Blessing)