

## **Bad Leaders?**

16<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B)

July 18, 2021

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Throughout human history, there have certainly been some bad leaders. This includes both in the church and in the world. In fact, for much of Christian history, there has been a lot of overlap between the two. Whether these leaders were greedy, arrogant, abusive, or indifferent, they have caused a lot of damage to the lives of the common people. The words of the Lord through Jeremiah the prophet in our first reading today therefore serve as a powerful rebuke of them: “woe to the shepherds who mislead and scatter the flock of my pasture... You have scattered my sheep and driven them away. You have not cared for them.” As this scripture passage demonstrates, we have the responsibility to hold our leaders accountable for their inhumane actions and policies.

While we should be critical of our leaders, however, we must be careful not to be too critical of them all the time. In my opinion, this is a growing concern today. Instead of finding common ground with our leaders or trusting their professional guidance, we all too readily label them as ‘bad’ if they don’t fit agendas or don’t meet our expectations for them. Once we go down this path, we will do anything to damage their reputation, nitpick about everything they do, and obsesses over their faults. In short, nothing they do is ever good enough.

In the same rebuke quoted from the book of Jeremiah, notice that the passage leaves room for good shepherds appointed by the Lord. Many leaders may in fact be good shepherds, leaders who do not

mislead people and do indeed care for them. They try their best each and every day. These good shepherds, like Jesus himself, are moved with pity for people. They are not self-serving, but want to provide guidance in ways that could really help others and society.

Leadership is a difficult skill. Perhaps our most dangerous thought is, 'I could do it better,' which is what social media has become. Maybe you could do it better, but ironically, the very attitude of 'I could do it better' is usually what makes for a bad future leader. "Good leaders," as Fr. Richard Rohr says, "know that there is no perfect solution." He continues, "that is the lie and false promise of the dualistic mind, polarity, and all-or-nothing thinking." (*The Naked Now*, 157) Good leaders, in other words, know that situations can be extremely complex. Instead of trying to do the impossible of finding the perfect solution, they instead do what is realistic and reasonable.

*Instead of only criticizing our leaders, we need to also support them. Are my criticisms of our leaders unfair? Can I recognize my opinions of them as highly subjective? Can I empathize with a leader who has to make difficult decisions each day? Will I at least acknowledge that a leader cares for people, even if I dislike them?*

As we continue with this mass, let us pray for our leaders- local, state, national, global, religious, and civil. Admittedly, they are not perfect, but who of us are?