

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

First Reading, Jeremiah 23.1-6, "I will raise up shepherds over them who will shepherd them." (4a)

The Psalm 23, "He leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul." (2b)

Second Reading, Ephesians 2.13-18, "In his flesh he made both Jews and Gentiles into one." (14a)

The Gospel, Mark 6.30-34, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." (31a)

Restlessly gathering all.

St. Paul today tells the Ephesians that by the blood of Christ all who were far off have been gathered near. Prophet Jeremiah prophesied centuries ago that this would happen. (3a) In the gospel Jesus is fully into this act of gathering all together. Evangelist Mark comments over the incident, *"He had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd."* (34a)

In fact, Jesus and the disciples were in this deserted place for some rest to which Jesus invited them. They all have been working tirelessly and were badly in need of rest. Jesus was in his mission as he used to be, and the disciples were out into the villages and towns all around to bring in the good news for which Jesus had sent them. They and Jesus both were tired. Jesus realized it and they realized it. However, the people who went ahead of the Jesus team did not realize nor did they respect the desire of Jesus to be alone with his dear disciples.

When these people surprised Jesus by being there ahead of his team, he totally forgot or discarded his original intention and responded to the people's need for shepherding. Instead of having rest the disciples had to be busy with crowd-control and ministering duty. Not only that, at the end of the day Jesus ordered them to serve food *'from nowhere'* for a big crowd of over five thousand men, besides women and children! This style is just a sample of God's working, being always available, being the shepherd twenty-four/seven, with no off days, no vacation, no sick leave! Does God want us to be so? If not always, some time, yes. Apparently, the incident narrated in today's gospel was not an emergency to warrant the action disregarding their long sought and overdue rest days. However, for Jesus every need of those who call upon him is an emergency and he responds accordingly.

Probably his desire is similar regarding our stewardship on his behalf. We may wonder where we have the energy for it. The answer is *'God provides to those who have a will.'* As St. Paul tells us today, God made Christ our peace through his blood. And Christ made us with the same blood his peace to the world, to our fellow beings in the world irrespective of caste, creed, color, nationality, etc., to break down all barriers of hostility and separation, and to make into one the Jews (Christians) and the gentiles. There is no more an outsider, no alien. We all are on a journey of pilgrimage to the Father, or better in the process of immigration to the promised land. We cannot afford to leave anyone behind us. That is our mission for Jesus, and from Jesus. That is the meaning of what Jeremiah tells today, *"I will raise up shepherds over them who will shepherd them."* (4a) We are those shepherds God raised up! Each of us in the plan of God, plan of Jesus, is a shepherd here and now. Be bold to be one, and venture out!

