

Reflecting on Sunday's Readings

THE SIXTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME—July 18, 2021

Introduction: Spiritual burn-out is a common problem among church workers, both professionals and volunteers. Because the needs of people are great and workers are few, gifted individuals step forward to meet these needs, sometimes taking on more than is humanly possible. Often excessive energy is expended through prolonged periods of service, then suddenly a vital laborer, discouraged, will resign, and withdraw from church life and activities, leaving everyone wondering what happened. Though several patterns may emerge, such as interpersonal conflict and feelings of being unappreciated, often the real problem is due to the violation of a basic principle: “If your output, exceeds your intake, then your upkeep, becomes your downfall.” They simply have burned-out or expended all their existing spiritual and emotional reserves. They had nothing left to give.

In this week's Gospel Reading Jesus seems aware of the principle, that when people have been heavily concentrating on ministry they need to renew and refresh their spiritual and emotional resources. This is true in any situation that draws heavily on one's spiritual and emotional reserves.

The disciples had just been sent out two-by-two into a stressful witnessing situation to share the Good News throughout the region. Probably they returned weary, only to find Jesus' ministry situation to be even more demanding. Consequently, Jesus invited them to temporarily come apart with him from the ministry demands of people, to rest and renew their energies. Later, when the enthusiastic crowds interrupted the start of this retreat, the disciples' spiritual and emotional reserves were tested.

Jesus undoubtedly was equally as tired as the disciples, yet we see him caring for both their needs and the needs of the crowd. He is the promised Good Shepherd, caring for their needs wisely, so that they can dwell securely. As this week's second reading indicates, “He is our peace,” and only as we are in close harmony with him will we be able to experience the peace he offers. It is essential for life and ministry that we avail ourselves of the necessary opportunities to refill our spiritual reservoir with his presence and the peace he offers. Obviously, the first place to do this is by regular and meaningful participation in Mass and Eucharist. However, with our hectic, fast-paced lifestyles we should also avail ourselves of daily reading sacred Scripture and prayer. In addition, we have the privilege, through personal or directed retreats to also withdraw into a lonely place to rest and renew our soul for an extended period of time. Stressful living is not work-free living. Jesus said that his “yoke is easy” and his “burden is light.” Perhaps, in life and ministry, when we find that the opposite is true we should accept our stress as a sign, a red flag, that our reservoir is nearly empty, and that it is time to concentrate on being refilled by the Holy Spirit.

“Without solitude it is virtually impossible to live a spiritual life. Solitude begins with a time and place for God, and Him alone. If we really believe not only that God exists but also that he is actively present in our lives—healing, teaching, and guiding—we need to set aside a time and space to give him our undivided attention. Jesus says, ‘Go to your private room and, when you have shut the door, pray to your Father who is in that secret place’ (Matthew 6:6). “...But we do not take the spiritual life seriously if we do not set aside some time to be with God and listen to Him.”*

Let us make this concept of coming apart from the busyness of life to a daily retreat with Jesus a reality for us even if it only involves a few minutes each day. We will find that it will become a great reservoir of strength.

* *Making All Things New*, by Henri J.M. Nouwen, (pages 69, 71).

First Reading — 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.”

1. Contrast the results of the two kinds of shepherds.

Responsorial Reading — Psalm 23:1-6

Second Reading — Ephesians 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.

2. How did God bring about reconciliation between the Gentiles and Jews?

3. Define reconciliation from this passage.

