

Homily for the Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B

Theme: Having the smell of the Sheep!

Several years ago, Pope Francis called on all the priests to bring God's power of grace closer to the people and so be 'shepherds living with the smell of the sheep.' And I believe this is the invitation we are to take to heart on this day. Remember, by virtue of our baptism we were made priests, kings and prophets.

Israel, initially, was entirely a Theocratic nation – a nation with God as their King. But so as to be like other nations forgetting that imitation is limitation in the words of John Mason, they preferred human kings and not God. And as fate would have it, there arose in Israel both good and bad kings. In the first reading of today (Jeremiah 23:1-6), Yahweh pronounces a woe on shepherds (to mean kings and other leaders) who have since scattered the sheep – in this case, the chosen people of Israel, by leading them from one disaster to another. Yahweh makes known the plan to consolidate back the remnants back to their fold under the guide and watchful care of good shepherds.

Saint Paul in the second reading of today (Ephesians 2:13-18) reminds the Ephesians that those who were once far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ. And so, to bring to safety the remnants, we became beneficiaries of the mystery of the incarnation when the Good Shepherd took charge of our lives. It is the same Jesus we encounter in the Gospel reading of today.

This reading (Mark 6:30-34) begins with an account of the disciples' return after they had been previously sent out by Jesus as we read in last week's Gospel. Having returned, Jesus tells His disciples to get away by themselves to rest. Having been out on their own, now they are back to Jesus – it is the relationship with the Lord that matters the most and not how much they had accomplished. Besides, we find out that Jesus and His disciples never get their little vacation – for on seeing a great crowd waiting for them, coming to them, Jesus had compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd.

The disciples of Jesus had accomplished their mission but still there was evident need for more, for the crowds still came looking for Jesus and His close associates. The crowds still looked malnourished. The crowds still had a deep yearning for God. They were helpless and hopeless without the chief shepherd. A lesson for each to take home: There will always be something left to be done, to be taught, to be yearned for, in the vineyard of the Lord.

Remember, unless our yearning for Jesus goes beyond the mere minimum; unless we have Jesus as our Good Shepherd; unless we have in us the desire to imitate Jesus and not others, we will always appear as sheep without a shepherd! We will always be in want as proclaimed by the psalmist (Psalm 23). Jesus is closer to our lives, to our families, and everywhere else. He is smelly with our desires, our imperfections and His remains the desire to make us better people. Like Jesus, ours remains the invitation to be bold enough and so be shepherds with the smell of the sheep.

May the intercession of our Lady, the ever-Blessed Virgin Mary, help us in this noble undertaking. Amen