

**16th Sunday of Ordinary Time B 2021**

**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."*

**Psalms 23:1-3, 3-4, 5, 6**

*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.*

*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.*

*You spread the table before me in the sight of my foes; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.*

*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.*

**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.*

**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.*



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*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.*

Such is our 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm which we have just heard in its entirety.

We heard from Jeremiah:

*Woe to the shepherds who mislead and scatter the flock of my pasture,  
says the LORD.*

Followed by God's promise:

*I myself will gather the remnant of my flock... and bring them back to their  
meadow.*

God then reveals the prophesy of the coming of a shoot of David by whom we are to be saved.

Jesus preached of God's love for each and every one of us:

*"What man among you having a hundred sheep and losing one of them would  
not leave the ninety-nine in the desert and go after the lost one until he finds  
it?" (Lk 15:4)*

And as we heard on the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter. Good Shepherd Sunday, Jesus proclaimed:

*I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*  
(Jn 10:11)

There has been so much wonderful reflection and writing about our Good Shepherd, from our Church Fathers to anyone who wished to put out a meditation booklet. I get a kick from a book written by Phillip Keller: *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*. He grew up as a shepherd and can tease out some of the realities out of the analogies. One of his perceptions are the similarities between sheep and humans. Quoting:

*It is no accident that God has chosen to call us sheep. The behavior of sheep  
and human beings is similar in many ways. Our mass mind (or mob instincts),  
our fears and timidity, our stubbornness and stupidity, our perverse habits are  
all parallels of profound importance.<sup>i</sup>*

This helps us remember that we are in need of saving, of being shepherded.

This is our Jesus. This is our Jesus, who in our Gospel reading today, received the reports of his apostles of what they had done. What did these apostles do?

Well, we heard in last Sunday's readings of the great commission, where Jesus sent them out two by two, with only the minimum provisions required to preach repentance, drive out demons, anoint the sick and cure them.

Our Gospel reading ends with Jesus coming upon the vast crowd gathered hungry in their hopes for Jesus. He pitied them as they were like sheep without a shepherd.

*And he began to teach them many things.*

He taught them what things?

Well, as one continues to read in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus proceeds to feed the 5,000 with 5 loaves and 2 fish.

Our passage today seems to be the in between of two big stories. The Great Commission is when the disciples are for the first time in the Bible referred to as Apostles, Jesus' sent ones, his ambassadors, his delegates through whom Jesus shares his authority. And they do big things: preach, exorcise demons and cure the sick.

The other big story is the miraculous feeding of the 5,000.

So, what's happening with our passage today? It seems the epilogue for the one or a prologue for the other. Yet there is treasure to be found in our little passage.

Upon the Apostles return, they gathered around Jesus. They have done marvelous things, but their authority comes from the One who sends. Like Jesus, they proclaimed repentance and performed exorcisms and healings.<sup>ii</sup> The marks of discipleship are to be with Jesus and doing the things of Jesus: teaching and marvelous works.

Jesus calls them to a deserted place to rest. This is an echo of our 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm of pastures, restful waters and refreshment. This is the promise offered to us after a life in service to our Lord, a rest from all the suffering and persecution we endure for his name:

*"Eternal rest grant on them, O Lord..."*

This rest is needed because:

*People were coming and going in great numbers, and they had no opportunity even to eat.*

We need to remember this crowd when later, other crowds were calling out, "Crucify him, crucify him!"

But our whole little passage is summed up with:

*[Jesus'] heart was moved with pity for them.*

Our English translation may be better understood in the original Greek, speaking of a compassion on the gut level, from the seat of emotions, one's heart.<sup>iii</sup>

This pity, is the bridge from compassion to action. Jesus taught and then he fed.

As we come to this altar to commune with Jesus and each other, may we enter into the paschal mystery of Christ, be moved to pity for the sheep, and inspire us to teach, feed and heal.



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<sup>i</sup> Keller, W. Phillip. *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23* (p. 7). Zondervan. Kindle Edition

<sup>ii</sup> John R. Donahue, S.J. & Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., *The Gospel of Mark, Sacra Pagina Series, Vol. 2* pp 204-205

<sup>iii</sup> *ibid*