

16th Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)

The main thread in today's readings seems to be sheep.

Now, I grew up on a farm, and sheep are known to be... how shall I put this? .. Not the most intelligent of animals. Now, there are some longhorn varieties that have fared well in the wild, but for the most part, without a lot of care and attention, they have a tendency to wander aimlessly until they become prey to wiser predatory animals.

In the first reading, Jeremiah is scolding the kings of Israel for the lack of care, which led to the Babylonian exile of the Israelites. He calls them basically Bad Shepherds, who have scattered the flock. But, he also prophesies that a Day is coming, when a righteous shoot of David, the epitome of a Good Israelite King, will come and rule wisely. If you remember, David was tending the flocks of his father Jesse when Samuel anointed him to be King. David was a Good Shepherd. And under this righteous shoot Jeremiah is talking about, the sheep will no longer tremble in fear, and none will be missing. They will be gathered together. They will be well cared for.

Then, in the Gospel, even though Jesus is exhausted and trying to find a quiet place for some R & R, the people flock to him, and he has pity on them, because, They are like sheep without a Shepherd. And we already discussed what happens to sheep that **aren't** cared for.

So, it seems that Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He is the shoot of David prophesied by Jeremiah, and Paul tells us that, In Christ Jesus, you who once were far off, have become near... by the blood of Christ. By his life blood... and his death.... And resurrection, He has gathered us together into one flock... the Church.

The Jews and Gentiles who were at enmity, have become one in Christ, as Paul tells the Ephesians. And even though the Church has had hard times over the course of some 2000 years, it still survives, Because the Good Shepherd is still among us, keeping the evil predators at bay. We still NEED Christ.

Because... Let's face it folks. WE are Sheep.

Left to our own devices, we usually don't fare too well. We wander around aimlessly, or are chasing after the wrong things, until we fall prey to the predator of sin and evil.

But.... We need not fear... Because... the Lord is our Shepherd. And if we heed his voice, he gives us repose in lush pastures. He leads us away to a deserted place where we can rest in the bosom of the Good Shepherd, and our souls are refreshed by prayer. He anointed our heads with oil at Baptism, and we were marked as members of His flock.

Here on this altar, He is about to spread a table before us, where he will feed us with his own Body and our cups will overflow with His own precious saving Blood.

If we follow Him along the right paths, he guides us upon, we need fear no evil. He is alive. He is at our side, and only goodness and kindness will follow US, all of our days.

And we shall dwell in his house for years to come, and if we die in his grace, we shall dwell in his heavenly mansion forever.....

All of which, if you think about it..... Is really not a bad deal.... For a bunch of stupid sheep.