

FROM FR. CHRIS ALIMAJI'S DESK

Reflections on the Qualities of Good Shepherds

On this Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B, 2021, our Bible Readings are: Jeremiah 23:1-6; Ephesians 2:13-18; Mark 6:30-34, and our Song of Praise of Praise is Psalm 23. In reflecting on this weekend's Bible Readings, several themes crossed my mind. I have chosen to reflect on the qualities of good shepherds. This is different from my previous topic on Jesus the Good Shepherd, though the same Psalm 23 generally applies.

Why do you and several people want to become leaders? We know that unjust leaders abound, so many of them fail as good leaders. Many leaders of governments and peoples are self-centered, looking after themselves and not after the people they govern. The words serve, service, provide, care, compassion, cure, liberate, justice, humane, *et cetera* are not in their dictionaries. But they have words such as control, command, law, authority, jail, flog, kill, punishment, imprisonment, banishment, injustice, inhuman, fear, tremble, insecurity, etc. to make their authorities felt. The Prophet Jeremiah prophesied at a time when there were many corrupt leaders, corrupt shepherds. They ended up in scattering and misleading the flock entrusted to their care. In other words, they ended up in terrorizing those they should have handled with care and failed to provide what was needed. Therefore, he foresaw a future when the true shepherd would appear on the scene. Hence, he prophesied about a future ruler who will rule with justice. **"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."** (Jer. 23:4). Read the remaining prophecy of Jeremiah in this passage yourself. Reading the Gospels, do we find that shepherd in Jesus, he who, among other things, also came after the lost sheep of Israel?

Many people want to become leaders. What is it that attracts you to positions of authority? **If your heart tells you that you have the answer to what God wants regarding shepherds, then you have a noble calling. It is a call to sacrifice your personal comfort and re-focus for the welfare of those entrusted to your care. It calls for compassion and empathy. My dictionary describes "empathy" as: "power of understanding, imaginatively entering into another's feelings."** Do we find these qualities in many leaders and world powers? Do they empathize the words in the paragraph above that are for good shepherds and leaders? In the Gospel of today, we find the apostles returning from their mission of last week to report on their ministry. Here we read of the necessity of giving feed back after being sent to do something. Does that send a message to every one of us? The ministry is not yours. You were sent! Then comes the time to rest – rest in the Lord, to be on retreat, be on revival exercise, take stock, a sacred time, vacation, you name it. **"Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while." (Mk. 6:31).** Retired but NOT tired! Sometimes, we need to plan to be on a retreat, or go on a holy pilgrimage, or a deep reflection into the desert of our lives and

take stock. Just see the turn-around! The Lord and the apostles went away to rest awhile. The large crowd awaiting them made him to re-focus. This is a lesson, an example, especially for us leaders of the people – priests, pastors, kings, leaders, mayors, governors, presidents, and even parents. We are the shepherds of the people.

St. Paul writing to the Ephesians tells us, among other things, that a just leader brings peace. That is a singular quality of good leadership. Referring to Christ, he says that “he is our peace” ... and that through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.” (Eph. 2:13-18). You will find its fullness in his Galatians 5:22-24. Christianity has brought many nations together. We call it unity in Christ. In this age, we are to uphold the preaching of Christ in the spirit of love, care, and concern; and cancel out Gal. 5:19-21, fruits of evil. That is why he sent us out in our various ministries and vocations. That is our mission. Is it not why we join whatever? If it is not, then forget it! You are on mission to bring peace to the scattered children of God. Every ministry must have its priority of mission. Or else, it will fail to keep up with the qualities of good shepherding.