

Today's readings speak to us about division and unity. The church wants us to see how Jesus is the true shepherd who will gather together the flock which has been scattered from his Father's pasture. We can actually see this happening in the readings. Jeremiah spoke of the shepherds who misled and scattered the flock. These were the leaders of Jerusalem: kings who fell into idolatry, and the priests and prophets who both went along with them or even encouraged them. The bad shepherds also refused to look after the poor and the most vulnerable. All of this was an offense to God and it resulted in the destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel and the end of the southern kingdom of Judah's independence. Jeremiah's prophecy is a warning about what's about to happen. Judah will be conquered by Babylon and it will remain a conquered nation up to and beyond the time of Christ. And that is the situation in the gospel, but before going there, a work of warning of my own. Those bad shepherds are still very much alive today. We see them in the church, we see them in politics, we see them in the media and entertainment industries. Our society has an over abundance of false shepherds who want to mislead and scatter us. No area of society is free of their influence. Pay attention to whose voice you are listening to and pay extra close attention to who your children are listening. As parents you have a right to see what your kids are doing online. Be good shepherds for your kids; don't abdicate your responsibility and let the bad shepherds mislead and scatter them.

Back to the gospel. The gospel shows us the scattered sheep, people who have suffered centuries of bad shepherds and who are now so desperate for the wisdom and mercy of Jesus that they follow him even after he and the Apostles take off in a boat for a deserted place.

Think about that for a minute. When you get into a boat to go somewhere, you are most likely going to go in a straight line to your destination. If you are on land and want to meet the people on the boat, you have to go around on the shore. In the gospel, who has to go the furthest? The guys in the boat or the people on land? The people on the land have to go the furthest distance. Yet Mark tells us that the crowd arrived at the deserted place before the boat with Jesus and the Apostles in it. What does that tell us about the people on the shore? They were so desperate for the good shepherd that they raced the boat on foot and were waiting for Jesus when he reached his destination. They recognized that there was something different about Jesus, something they hadn't seen in any of the other shepherds of their day. Even though he often taught in parables and his true identity was hidden,

the hearts of the people in the crowd must have burned when they heard him speak. Created by God to be good and with the true law of God inscribed on their hearts, they were instinctively drawn to the source of all goodness and truth. The gathering of the people from many towns in that deserted place is the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy in the first reading. Jesus was drawing the scattered sheep back together. His heart was moved with pity for them and he began to teach them many things.

The reading from Saint Paul tells us that Jesus is our peace. Paul wrote: "You who were once far off have become near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, he made both one and broke down the dividing wall of enmity, through his flesh." Remember that this is Saint Paul and everything he writes is packed with meaning and can often mean multiple things at the same time. In this passage we find reference to Jesus' redeeming sacrifice on the Cross by which he brings us who have been scattered and far away back to God. When Paul wrote: "He made both one" he could be referring to Jesus' dual nature: Jesus is true God and true Man in one person. The divine second person of the Holy Trinity humbled himself and took on our full humanity so that we can share in his divinity. In his own body he eliminates the separation between us and God. That same passage can also apply to the separation between peoples, specifically between Jew and Gentile. Paul says that Jesus "made both one and broke down the dividing wall of enmity." That dividing wall can be understood as the wall in the Jerusalem temple which separated the court of the Gentiles from the inner temple in which only Jews were allowed to enter. A gentile who entered the inner temple would be faced with the death penalty. For Paul this wall represented the Old Testament ritual and purity laws which kept the Israelites separate from the other people they encountered. By shedding his blood on the Cross, Jesus perfectly fulfilled all of the laws of the Old Covenant and ushered in the New Covenant. His sacrifice broke down that dividing wall of enmity by abolishing all those laws which kept Jew and Gentile separated. A new age began, an age when all nations are to be united in Christ. Obviously we still have a long way to go with that—not because Jesus failed in his mission, but because—as I said earlier—the bad shepherds are still out there trying to mislead and scatter us.

Finally, Paul may not have intended this passage to be Eucharistic, but that doesn't mean it can't be applied to the Eucharist. The Eucharist is a sacrament of unity. When we consume the flesh and blood of Jesus we become part of him and

he becomes part of us. Jesus cannot be divided against himself. It is only through Jesus--through the power of his blood shed on the cross and the power of his flesh and blood which he gives us in the Eucharist--that the divisions that exist between us can truly be healed. Let us ask Jesus to heal us, to heal the wounds of division within our nation and the world, the wounds of division within our Church and our parish, the wounds of division within our families, and within our own souls.

Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, have mercy on us

Sorrowful and Immaculate heart of Mary, pray for us

Saint Joseph, terror of demons and pillar of families