

Reading: [Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time | USCCB](#)

Are you tired of not knowing what to do in situations? Do you sometimes have a hard time going to sleep because a problem keeps spinning in your mind? Does everything bad seem to happen to you? If so, you need my new book: *The only advice you will ever need!*

Have a lot of negative feelings bottled up? Get yourself some comfort food and eat your feelings! Struggling with finances? Get to a casino near you! You will probably lose more money, but hey, imagine if you get lucky! Do you have insecurities about your looks? Improve your complexion to look better and finally be liked for who you are not! If life gives you lemons, chuck them at someone! Let out your rage.

When you don't know what to do... when you don't know who to listen to... when you don't know where to begin... just pick up my book, and let me show you the way! You can trust me; I am a Catholic Priest, *take my word for it!* It can be yours for only five easy payments of \$99.99, so get yours today! (*All proceeds will go towards the Annual Catholic Appeal. Author is not responsible for your bad luck. Reader discretion not advised*).

Who is in? Who wants a copy? No? Darn... couldn't fool ya...

Sounded ridiculous... right? Like those bad exaggerated infomercials we have all seen on TV... we see them and wonder “who would buy that?” We think of ourselves as too smart to fall for false advertisement, yet they work, many do fall for it.

Ok so who of you at one point owned one of those electric ab belts? A ThighMaster? A Snuggie? A Shake Weight? (Oh, I know some in here have but will not admit it... you can say “you know someone who did”...)

Perhaps not everyone might fall for a bad infomercials, but we do fall for other things...

For example, we often fall for the wrong advice, listen to the wrong person, get easily influenced by an idea, fad, or ideology... and we are more prone to fall for this bad advice when we are desperate... when something happens in our lives that creates an imbalance and we seek guidance, answers, peace... so we take anything and anyone that might give us even a glimmer of hope... we do it at a personal level, and as a group.

In psychology a term often used for this social phenomenon is “herd mentality.” This happens a lot in political and religious movements, since politics

and faith are powerful tools for seeking answers. So naturally, it is also in these areas where there are the highest chances of being led astray.

There are plenty of historical examples of leaders who were able to persuade whole nations into thinking or doing horrendous acts. We all hear the occasional story on the news about a religious cult leader who convinces their followers to give a lot of money so they can get their private jet, or as it happened in the 80's, convince people to commit mass suicide so their souls can go up to a comet that was passing by the earth which was a spaceship that would take their souls to heaven... and people did it... true story, look it up.

Like bad infomercials, we think: who would believe something like that? But when desperate, when something is off in our lives, we are all prone to fall for it, human nature...

It happened many times with the people of Israel, it is what Jeremiah is reflecting on in the first reading. They were first slaves in Egypt because of a bad leader and their propensity to follow... in the wilderness they fell into idolatry because like a herd they got tired of waiting so came up with a false god to give them hope... they finally reach Jerusalem the promised land, and after many bad leaders, again, they ended up as slaves but this time in Babylon.

Jeremiah notices this trend, and in his reflection realizes that the problem is inevitable... people are bound to follow, and leaders, even those with good intentions, are prone to lead astray... so he comes up with the analogy of a shepherd.

He says that a bad shepherd **does not care** to mislead others, while a good shepherd **does care**. A bad shepherd **scatters** the flock while a good shepherd **gathers** them. A bad shepherd will give **false** information while a good shepherd will speak **truth**. A bad shepherd will leave people in **fear**, while a good shepherd will make people feel **secure**. Not care/care. Scatter/gather. False/truth. Fear/security.

People needed a good shepherd, but because it is impossible for a human being to embody these qualities perfectly, God intervened and revealed to him that God would provide this leader so that humanity could finally follow someone who would not lead them astray.

As Christians, we hold that this leader is Jesus, hence why one of the titles we give Jesus is the good shepherd, in reference to Jeremiah's analogy.

The gospels are testimonies, it is God making a case for Jesus, it is God fighting to earn our trust in a world where we have many options so that we realize

we need to stop searching for answers elsewhere, lest like Israel, we end up deceived time and time again.

When Jesus saw this, he is moved with pity *for they were like sheep without a shepherd...*

What does Jesus do? begins to teach them... fights for their trust, invites them into a relationship so they can realize: he is all we need...

Jesus continues to fight for us today, for our trust, competing against other forms of influences and people that might promise hope, and the challenge for us Christians who accept Christ as the true shepherd is to entrust our lives to Jesus...

What does that mean? To things. *First, it means surrender*, letting of the idea that we have control, and had it over to Christ. Here is a prayer I suggest for you that comes from Ignatian Spirituality. It is called the *Suscipe* which means “surrender.”

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty,

my memory, my understanding,

and my entire will,

All I have and call my own.

You have given all to me.

To you, Lord, I return it.

Everything is yours; do with it what you will.

Give me only your love and your grace,

that is enough for me.

Pray that every night as you go over your day. It is difficult to pray this sometimes when there are areas in our lives we fear losing control of, but this is where trusting God comes in... if we don't, when we lose control and find ourselves desperate, we will be susceptible to falling victims of bad advice, of being deceived by something or someone. But, if we surrender to Christ, God will never take advantage of us, Christ will never deceive us, for we trust that Jesus is the only shepherd who embodies those qualities we seek for perfectly.

Second, entrusting our lives to Jesus means living a life of *discernment*.

Discernment simply means being open to God's grace in our lives, and in everything that we do, to begin it by asking "Lord, where would you like to lead me in this situation?" When we surrender our own desires and honestly seek God's will in our lives, then we become more sensitive to seeking and desiring the things that are true, good and beautiful... only then can we identify and reject a bad infomercial when it is being offered. **Surrender** and **discern**.

Are you tired of not knowing what to do in situations? Do you sometimes have a hard time going to bed because a problem keeps spinning in your mind? Do you often seem to find yourself in the wrong place at the wrong time and luck just never seems to be on your side? Well have I got the solution for you!

When you don't know what to do... when you don't know who to listen to... when you don't know where to begin... start with prayer! But don't take my word for it, I'm just a human...! Go to Jesus, and find out.

+ Fr. Carlos Orozco
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