

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

July 18, 2021

Reading I – 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.”

Jeremiah 23:1—6. This book covers a turbulent time in the history of Judah (597-587 BCE). Jeremiah was called to be a prophet when he was a young man. It was well before the time of the first exile (probably around 627 BCE), and his gut-wrenching experiences included rejection, persecution, “jail time,” and finally, being thrown into a cistern and left to die. Luckily, he was rescued. In this passage, we find him critiquing the politics of his day. He is speaking God’s displeasure with the “shepherds” or the kings, stating that they lead the people astray and are responsible for the dire circumstances of the day.

Although Jeremiah laments the terrible state of affairs, he believes that God will gather the people in exile and lead them back home. This will happen under a leader of King David’s dynasty who will “do what is just and right in the land.” Although Jeremiah had no special person in mind, it is easy to see how Christians would apply this passage to Jesus.

If we dare to let ourselves grasp the full impact of what is happening in our country today, where do we see glimmers of hope among our political as well as church leaders?

Responsorial Psalm – Psalm 23:1-3, 3-4, 5, 6

R. (1) The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

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.

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

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.

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

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

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

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.

R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

Psalm 23. The beautiful imagery of this psalm reflects the Old Testament view of leadership, especially the king. He is like a shepherd who has a close, personal relationship with each sheep and cares deeply about each one. His role is to provide security, food, and drink. The shepherd seeks out one who strays off and searches for it until he finds it and brings it “home” again. So it is with our God. The psalm suggests that even when we wander through the dark valleys of life, our God is always there beside us and will one day lead us to green pastures.

In the first reading from Jeremiah, the prophet is expressing God's anger with the leaders of Israel who have more concern about their status, personal comfort and well-being rather than providing for the people.

Reading II – 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.

Ephesians 2:13-18 – Please see comments for last weekend for background on this letter.* This section of the letter is speaking to the Gentiles who had entered the community of Jesus’ followers. Remember there had been a long history of the Jewish people to whom—and through whom—God chose to reveal the divine presence to the world. According to the Book of Genesis, commanded through Abraham (approximately 1800 years BCE) that males be circumcised as a sign of the covenant. Circumcision was not practiced in other nations, so it became customary for Jews to refer to themselves as people of the circumcision, whereas Gentiles were referred to as people of uncircumcision. Paul used these terms to refer to the mission of Peter as being primarily to the circumcised, while Paul’s mission came to be known as the mission to the uncircumcised.

Paul is reminding the Gentiles of their earlier status before becoming followers of Jesus. They were “outsiders” and therefore not able to benefit from the promises God made to Israel. While they may have had their own “gods,” they did not have a relationship to the God of Israel, but that all changed once they became believers in Jesus who “broke down the dividing wall of enmity.” That unfortunate state was left behind. They were no longer considered estranged. Through the blood of Christ, now they too are in relationship to God. Because of Christ’s death, Jews and Gentiles are now one. Because of their relationship to Christ, they were now united in a bond of peace as members of his body.

In Ephesians there is this beautiful imagery of all dwelling together in peace, tranquility, and safety, but we know that the historical reality of the growing Church was not always consistent with that. The Council of Jerusalem (49 CE) is a reminder of that when it was convened by leaders to solve tension between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians about what was necessary to be a member of the community. Some from a Jewish background tried to insist upon circumcision and

other practices from their pre-Jesus Judaism that were foreign to the uncircumcised who were entering the community.

Those of us who lived in the pre-Vatican II era might well remember how we brought people into the “Holy Catholic Church.” Even though baptized in another Christian tradition, the person had to be baptized again—conditionally. Sometimes we still put more emphasis on dogma and practice instead of fostering and celebrating people who are becoming one with us in faith in Jesus.

*Please note that the commentaries for the previous week are now on the parish website.

Gospel – 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.

Mark 6:30-34. Last week we saw Jesus sending his disciples out “two by two.” They pushed back the force of evil (exorcisms) and anointed and healed many who were ill. Now, they are reporting back to Jesus, and he invites them to a desolate place where they can find rest. This didn’t happen, however, since the people were hungry for what this charismatic man and his disciples had to offer. When Jesus got out of the boat, he was immediately filled with compassion for the crowd. He saw how hungry they were for the word he spoke to them. In his preaching, they found a new sense of meaning to their lives; they learned about a caring God who was kind and compassionate; their lives were suddenly open to a new sense of hope. Jesus is a leader who knows how to be a good shepherd, providing people that which they need most in life. In the Old Testament receiving the words of wisdom was referred to as eating and drinking. In fact, in the wisdom literature, “Lady Wisdom” invites all to a lovely banquet where they will be properly nourished—unlike the “junk food” they would receive at the table of “Dame Folly.” Although Jesus is nourishing people with his presence and his word, in the next scene he

