

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, JULY 18, 2021, Jeremiah 23, 1--6, [Ps 23:1-3, 3-4, 5, 6](#), Ephesians 2:13-18, Mark 6:30-34.

"The Lord is my shepherd, there is nothing I shall want" (Jeremiah 23:1).

Last Sunday's readings presented the Lord's call to a prophetic vocation. In the first reading, God sent Prophet Amos, saying, "Go prophesy to my people" (Amos 7:15). In the gospel, God sent twelve Apostles to do the same, to shepherd his people from their exile from God and lead them on the road to paradise. Why does the Lord care about us? Would he lose his monthly salary or health care benefits or insurance if he does not reach out to us? No. He is self-sufficient. He reaches out because he is our shepherd. He loves us. The Lord Jesus plainly said, "I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, as the Father knows me, and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep" (John 10:14-15). In life there are times that we walk in the dark valley and shadow of death, but the Lord saves our life.

This brings us to the theme for today's homily, "The Lord is my shepherd, there is nothing I shall want." This passage seems to have been inspired by Isaiah 40:11, which says, "Like a shepherd he feeds his flock in his arms he gathers the lambs, carrying them in his bosom and leading the ewes with care." When life's challenges come, there is a temptation to forget that we are not paddling canoes of life across the ocean of time all alone. The Lord of hosts is with us. The God of Jacob is our stronghold. The Lord says, "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" (Jeremiah 23:3-4). The Lord fulfilled this promise literally when he brought our ancestors in faith back to Jerusalem from Babylon. He fulfills it, above all by reconciling us to God. "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:19). Today's Second reading puts it eloquently, "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" (Ephesians 2:13).

Since God is not an object that we can subject to experimentation there is a temptation to think that he is not there. The secular mind tends to denigrate spiritual realities as unreal. But the truth is that the invisible world is more real than the visible, according to Plato. God shepherds us more than we can ever know. We see the supreme proof of this in the crucifixion of the Son of God. He laid down his life so that we may be saved. A good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. On their return from intense missionary work, the Lord wanted the disciples to get away by themselves and rest. But the moment he saw the vast crowd looking like sheep without a shepherd, he put their vacation on hold and set about teaching the people about the kingdom of God. "Not only was he not annoyed with them, but he felt compassion on seeing their spiritual needs" (Jose Maria Escriva). By the end of the day, he did not send the multitude home hungry, he fed them with the miraculous multiplication of loaves and fish. The crowd gathering on the green grass (see [Mark 6:39](#)) in today's Gospel is the beginning of the remnant that the Lord himself will shepherd and bring back from wherever they were scattered. Reflecting on our Lord's pity for the crowd, Scott Hahn observed, "Jesus is moved to pity, seeing them as sheep without a shepherd. This phrase was used by Moses to describe Israel's need for a shepherd to succeed him (see [Numbers 27:17](#)). And as Moses appointed Joshua, Jesus appointed the Twelve to continue shepherding His people on earth" (Sunday Bible Reflections , July 18, 2021).

This was contrary to the ways of some of the Old Testament kings of Jeremiah's time. These kings included Zedekiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim and Jeconiah. Instead of shepherding, Jehoiakim, for instance, took advantage of those he should have shepherded. He built his house on wrong and his terraces on injustice, he defrauded laborers out of their wages (Jeremiah 22:13). His eyes were set on nothing except his own selfish gain, He shed innocent blood, and practiced oppression and extortion"(Jeremiah 22:17). This is also true for other shepherds of that time and ours. Speaking about

priests and prophets who were godless, Jeremiah said, "They say to those who despise the word of the Lord, Peace shall be yours and to everyone who walks in hardness", "No evil shall overtake you (Jeremiah 23:17). That is why the sharp rebuke from the Lord to those false shepherds, "Woe to the shepherds who mislead and scatter the flock of my pasture" (Jeremiah 23:1).

Just as the Lord commanded the Prophet Amos, "Go prophesy to my people", he says to us go shepherd my flock. What do we owe the Lord who is so good to us as our shepherd? The answer is love. The command the Lord gave to Peter comes to mind here, "Feed my lambs." "Tend my sheep" (John 21:15, 16). The word he spoke to Peter, he speaks to us, his disciples, today. Some of us may say, I can see how a priest or bishop can be a shepherd, but not me. The truth is that our baptism makes us priest, prophet, king (shepherd).

HOW CAN A LAY PERSON BE A SHEPHERD?

"Christ . . . fulfills this prophetic office, not only by the hierarchy . . . but also by the laity. He accordingly establishes them as witnesses and provides them with the sense of the faith [sensus fidei] and the grace of the word" (CCC 904, LG 35). It is our call to shepherd one another. It is not an exclusive preserve of the clergy or members of the hierarchy. The decree on the vocation of the laity is clear.

To teach in order to lead others to faith is the task of every preacher and each believer. Clarifying this further, the Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People states, "This witness of life, however, is not the sole element in the apostolate; the true apostle is on the lookout for occasions of announcing Christ by word, either to unbelievers . . . or to the faithful"(AA 6§3, AG 15).

The Church works better when there is collaboration between the Laity and the clergy. "Let all follow the bishop, as Jesus Christ follows his Father, and the college of presbyters as the apostles; respect the deacons as you do God's law. Let no one do anything concerning the Church in separation from the bishop" (St. Ignatius of Antioch, Ad Smyrna. 8,1: Apostolic Fathers,II/2,309). Clergy and laity are two lungs with which the work of evangelization breathes. Do not fight and quarrel with your clergy or make difficult for one another. We are a team.

Prayer is the key to shepherding one another. If you do not seek to know his will, you cannot shepherd the Lord's flock well. The other way to shepherd is doing corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, sheltering the homeless, counselling the doubtful, instructing the ignorant, burying the dead and praying for the living and the dead.

CONCLUSION

God is our shepherd. He wants us to be co-workers with him. As shepherds we can be his instruments in shepherding one another. Like St Paul, may we be able to say:

"Praised be God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all consolation! He comforts us in all our afflictions and thus enables us to comfort those who are in trouble, with the same consolation we have received from him" (2 Corinthians 1:3-5).

A PLEA TO OUR SHEPHERD

Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou who leadest Joseph like a flock! Thou who art enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh! Stir up thy might and come to save us (Psalm 80:1-2).