

**ECHOING GOD’S WORD
IN THE
CATHOLIC FAITH COMMUNITY
SIXTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
July 21, 2024**

SCRIPTURES:

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| Jeremiah 23:1-6 | God will gather people as shepherds gather their sheep. |
| Ephesians 2:13-18 | In Christ, Jews and Gentiles are reconciled in peace. |
| Mark 6:30-34 | People with no leader find one in the Good Shepherd. |
| Psalms 23 | God is faithful as our Shepherd. |

SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND:

Jeremiah:

Jeremiah exercised his prophetic ministry in the land of Judah at Jerusalem between 627 and 580 B.C.E. During this time, the Temple was destroyed and the king taken into exile, as well as the majority of the population. The last three kings had been unworthy shepherds of the Lord’s people. Jeremiah speaks in God’s name as he promises a shepherd who will fulfill all the Lord’s promises, a shepherd who will truly accomplish the Lord’s righteousness.

Ephesians:

In the Temple at Jerusalem, there was a stone wall dividing the Jews and the Gentiles. Gentiles could not enter as “near” to God as Jews could. The division was marked by “circumcision” and “uncircumcision.” Alienation between Jew and Gentiles was more than physical. They were worlds apart emotionally and spiritually. Jews considered Gentiles “unclean,” ritually and spiritually. In the body of Christ, the wall of separation has been broken down: Jews and Gentiles are now one in Christ. Joined to Christ by faith and baptism, they are now radically reconciled to one another. They cannot be joined to Christ without being joined to one another. In the Church, there can be no distinction based on anything but the Lord’s gifts. Only the Lord will mark those distinctions.

Mark:

This is the one time in Mark’s Gospel that the word apostle is used. Here it simply means missionaries, those who were sent on mission. In Luke and in Acts, the term becomes an official title for the primary witnesses of Jesus’ resurrection.

“A place apart, with Jesus.” Christian disciples have found in these words an image of the refreshing rest they need and find in the company of the Lord Jesus Christ. For those familiar

with the Jewish Scriptures, it recalls the entry of the Lord's people into the Promised Land. For us today, it is a pledge of heavenly happiness.

The Shepherd of Israel is the Lord. Mark is quite clear in identifying Jesus in that role which is reserved to God alone. When all human shepherds have proved unstable and unsuccessful, God will shepherd the people through Jesus.

Those who have been shepherded by Jesus through his teachings will in turn be called to shepherd others and so forth, down through the ages. The teachings that Jesus imparted to his disciples were meant not only for themselves but for those who would come once Jesus had returned to the Father. From their role as disciples, they will themselves become apostles. They will take up the ministry of Jesus and teach others what they have been taught. Mark makes this reversal of roles a main feature of his Gospel. Perhaps more than any other evangelist, he stresses the task and ministry of disciples who have to become messengers of the Good News in their own right.

Accountability to Jesus Christ becomes very clear once we grasp the connection between discipleship and apostleship. The authenticity of the Church's mission needs to be tested always against the words and works of Jesus himself. That is why Scripture must be proclaimed time and time again to the Church itself, so that even the apostles in it will be re-evangelized again and again.

We, too, are called to a place of rest with Jesus, but crowds will come seeking love.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How does God provide for the needs of people today? What role does the Church have in caring for God's people? What role do we have as a parish? What role does your family have? What role do you have personally? Do you see your parish, and yourself within it, as truly sent by Jesus Christ to do the shepherding that he himself did? Who will provide if we do not?

2. How important do you think the role of teaching is in the Church, in your parish community, in your family? Do you consider teaching to be the primary means by which God's people are to be shepherded today? Why does teaching have priority over celebrating sacraments and over running a soup kitchen? (Those tasks must be done simultaneously with teaching, of course!)

3. What are some of the divisions that still exist between groups of people, even after two millennia of Christianity? Is there any hope for the healing of some of those divisions by the end of this century? Where will the healers come from? Who is sending them?

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, your name is "Justice."

Lord, have mercy.

Christ Jesus, your name is "Mercy."

Christ, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, your name is "Shepherd."

Lord, have mercy.

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

In the Catholic tradition, prayer and contemplation have always held priority of place. The Church continues to value and to promote the various experiences of prayer and meditation that center on Christ the Lord. Men and women dedicated to the contemplative life are held in highest esteem. Even in these times of pragmatic, result-orientated activity, the Church calls all its members to a profound life of prayer even as it calls them to an apostolic life of world-transforming engagement.

Members of monastic orders, religious men and women under vows in apostolic congregations, members of secular institutes, diocesan priests and deacons, and also all of the laity, are invited to a life of prayer in the Liturgy of the Hours. This prayer form, along with the Liturgy of the Eucharist, provides an invaluable resource of prayerful communion with the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are invited to “come apart and rest a little” with the Lord Jesus, in order to be refreshed at the sources of spiritual life. The Psalms have always been the prayer book of the Jewish and the Christian communities. Bible lessons along the liturgical year nourish and teach our hearts and souls.

Jesus prayed from the Book of Psalms, which he knew by heart. He could call up verses and whole psalms at various times, both in sorrow and in joy.

When we pray, especially at Eucharist and in the Liturgy of the Hours, our voices give voice to the Lord Jesus as he continues his prayer of praise to the heavenly Father. Now, through the words inspired by the Holy Spirit and uttered by Jesus in his earthly life, Jesus Christ continues an eternal utterance through the Mystical Body.

It is a privilege and a joy for us to be associated with Christ in his prayer to the Father. We need to take many moments in which to experience this time apart.

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