

Mark 6:30-34

The apostles rejoined Jesus and told him all they had done and taught. Then he said to them, 'You must come away to some lonely place all by yourselves and rest for a while'; for there were so many coming and going that the apostles had no time even to eat. So they went off in a boat to a lonely place where they could be by themselves. But people saw them going, and many could guess where; and from every town they all hurried to the place on foot and reached it before them. So as he stepped ashore he saw a large crowd; and he took pity on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he set himself to teach them at some length.

Jesus did not try to avoid the crowd or to send them away; he became fully present to them. In the words of the gospel, 'he took pity on them', 'he had compassion for them.' That is very much at the heart of our own calling as the Lord's followers, to be present to others, even when they turn up unexpectedly and interrupt what we had carefully planned. It is so easy to get worked up and irritated when something happens that is not part of the script we had in our head. We can be so fixed on that script that we can look on people as nuisances instead of being present to them with the compassion of Jesus. Jesus had the habit of spending time alone with God; it was those times of presence to God in prayer that enabled him to be present to others, no matter who they were or how they turned up. Our own coming away to be with the Lord will help us too to be present to those who come into our lives. Our contemplative moments, our desert times, help us to be contemplative, attentive, in our way of relating to those who cross our path in life.

*I am like the sick sheep that strays from the rest of the flock,
Unless the Good Shepherd takes me on His shoulders and carries
me back to His fold, my steps will falter, and in the very effort
of rising, my feet will give way.*

(St. Jerome)

Sixteenth Sunday

Year B

July 21st 2024



Today's readings highlight God's care for His people and the unity brought by Christ. Jeremiah speaks of God condemning bad leaders and promising to lead His people with wisdom and justice. This shows God's commitment to guide and protect His flock. Ephesians highlights how Christ's sacrifice has made us one. He has broken down barriers, giving us all access to the Father and creating peace among us. In Mark's Gospel, Jesus sees the crowd's need and teaches them with compassion. He recognizes their need for guidance, like sheep without a shepherd

Opening Prayer

Show favour, O Lord, to your servants and mercifully increase the gifts of your grace, that, made fervent in hope, faith and charity, they may be ever watchful in keeping your commands.

Jeremiah 23:1-6

‘Doom for the shepherds who allow the flock of my pasture to be destroyed and scattered – it is the Lord who speaks! This, therefore, is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says about the shepherds in charge of my people: You have let my flock be scattered and go wandering and have not taken care of them. Right, I will take care of you for your misdeeds – it is the Lord who speaks! But the remnant of my flock I myself will gather from all the countries where I have dispersed them, and will bring them back to their pastures: they shall be fruitful and increase in numbers. I will raise up shepherds to look after them and pasture them; no fear, no terror for them any more; not one shall be lost – it is the Lord who speaks! ‘See, the days are coming – it is the Lord who speaks – when I will raise a virtuous Branch for David, who will reign as true king and be wise, practising honesty and integrity in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel dwell in confidence. And this is the name he will be called: The-Lord-our-integrity.’

The shepherds condemned by Jeremiah were the leaders who neglected their responsibilities and let abuses thrive. His message today might be to political figures, ministers and government officials at all levels, who have the task of keeping public order, defending the rights of citizens and promoting fairness for all, insofar as possible. The shepherd image suggests that *authority* is not mainly the power to impose rules. The shepherding role is one of service more than dominion. Its goal is to set a good direction and enable a community to live together in peace, where each individual has dignity and an equal chance of personal fulfilment

Psalm 22(23)

*The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.
Fresh and green are the pastures where he gives me repose.
Near restful waters he leads me, to revive my drooping spirit.
He guides me along the right path; he is true to his name.
If I should walk in the valley of darkness no evil would I fear.
You are there with your crook and your staff; with these you give me comfort.
You have prepared a banquet for me in the sight of my foes.
My head you have anointed with oil; my cup is overflowing.
Surely goodness and kindness shall follow me all the days of my life.
In the Lord's own house shall I dwell for ever and ever.*

Ephesians 2:13-18

In Christ Jesus, you that used to be so far apart from us have been brought very close, by the blood of Christ. For he is the peace between us, and has made the two into one and broken down the barrier which used to keep them apart, actually destroying in his own person the hostility caused by the rules and decrees of the Law. This was to create one single New Man in himself out of the two of them and by restoring peace through the cross, to unite them both in a single Body and reconcile them with God: in his own person he killed the hostility. Later he came to bring the good news of peace, peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near at hand. Through him, both of us have in the one Spirit our way to come to the Father.

There are three ways in which Paul uses the word *peace* in this passage: "He is our peace," he says, speaking of Christ, and He has made peace, and "He came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near." In those three occurrences of the word *peace*, we have the apostle's outline of how Christ makes peace, the way he goes about it. So, it is very important that we note these. He is our peace -- that is the origin of peace. Then there is the process of peace, how it is actually brought about -- he came and made peace. Finally, there is the means of laying hold or possessing that peace -- he preached peace.

Alleluia, alleluia!

*The sheep that belong to me listen to my voice,
says the Lord, I know them and they follow me.*

Alleluia!

Prayer over the Offerings

O God, who in the one perfect sacrifice brought to completion varied offerings of the law, accept, we pray, this sacrifice from your faithful servants and make it holy, as you blessed the gifts of Abel, so that what each has offered to the honour of your majesty may benefit the salvation of all.

Prayer after Communion

Graciously be present to your people, we pray, O Lord, and lead those you have imbued with heavenly mysteries to pass from former ways to newness of life.