

REFLECTION FOR THE SIXTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

There is one word that stands out in today's readings, the word *shepherd*. As Israel was a people where flocks and their shepherds were part of the landscape, the people were perfectly familiar with the figure of the *shepherd*. It was the shepherd's job to look after the sheep of his flock, to lead them to the meadows to feed them, to protect them from wolves and thieves. A flock without a shepherd is a flock without protection, liable to be attacked, to get lost in the desert, to die of hunger. In the Bible, kings, other leaders of the people including prophets and priests are often compared to shepherds and called the shepherds of the People of God.

This is why, in the first reading, through the prophet Jeremiah, God rebukes the leaders to whom he entrusted his people for being bad shepherds: they scattered his sheep and did not look after them. It is also why the Lord promises that He himself will take care of his people, that he would be the *shepherd* of his people, and punishing the bad shepherds for their bad deeds. In the Gospels, Jesus proclaims himself to be the *Good Shepherd*. In him, Jeremiah's prophecy *is fulfilled*: the Lord himself has come to care for his flock, to give his life for his sheep.

Today's Gospel highlights Jesus' attention to people, his concern for them, his care to feed them with the Word of God. We are told that Jesus, after crossing Lake Galilee by boat with his disciples, and whom he had invited to rest for a while, met a crowd of people on the other side of the lake, whom Jesus pitied because "*they were like sheep without a shepherd*".

Today the Lord continues to send us his *shepherds*, asking them to look after his sheep, to be good shepherds like Jesus, to teach the people, to look after his sheep, to give their lives for his flock. It is our prayer that our shepherds today may make a family out of the people they are entrusted with, where there is no distinction between peoples, but all love each other like brothers and sisters, as Christ taught us and as St. Paul mentions in today's second reading.

Paul says that Christ came to announce the "*good news of peace*" for all so that we may we all live the peace of Christ in our lives and be instruments of peace. As fathers and mothers, as authorities before the people, as teachers, doctors, engineers, and priests we pray that we may we be "good shepherds", good leaders, *but with a heart, with the heart of Jesus*.

Let us pray for our *shepherds* and ask the Lord to send us many holy shepherds: priests, deacons, catechists, and community leaders. May the Lord be our shepherd and teach us to be shepherds like him.