

**16th Sunday in Ordinary Time--"B" Cycle—2021--St. Leonard, 10:30 & online**  
Jeremiah 23:1-6; Psalm 22:1-3,3-4,5,6; Ephesians 1:13-18; Mark 6:30-34

**I. Introduction**

- A. Jim Wallis, the founding editor of *Sojourners* magazine writes: “At times I think the truest image of God today is a black inner-city grandmother in the U.S. or a mother of the disappeared in Argentina or the women who wake up early to make tortillas in refugee camps. They all weep for their children and in their compassionate tears arises the political action that changes the world. The mothers show us that it is the experience of touching the pain of others that is the key to change.” Today’s Gospel presents such a God in Jesus who laments over the “sheep without a shepherd.” (Kayala blog, 7-16-2018)
- B. I think that is a good quote to begin thinking about the image of the shepherd in today’s readings. We heard of bad shepherds in the first reading, the Lord as our shepherd in the psalm, and Jesus as a shepherd in the gospel.
- C. Many people have a problem with the shepherd and sheep imagery because they don’t want to be compared to sheep, who are rather docile, smelly and not smart enough to take care of themselves.

**II. Multiple Shepherds**

- A. Well, you may have noticed that these readings focus more on the shepherds than the sheep. Eleonore Stump reminds us that there are lots of different types of shepherds: “Surely no one of us is so benighted as to suppose that God’s thundering against miserable shepherds is meant only for priests who aren’t good enough. That thundering is a warning for each one of us.  
“Every person has many of God’s children in his care. The woman who empties your trash at work, the child in the row behind you who kicks your seat on the plane, the annoying non-stop talker at your dinner table, your old and highly inadequate mother, your very imperfect spouse—each of these is one of God’s children, and each of them is in your care—a little or maybe even a lot.  
“All these are people that we ourselves shepherd—always with our Shepherd, whose grace we need to do it well.” (liturgy.slu.edu, July 18, 2021)
- B. It’s easy to criticize shepherds. We have bishops who judge Pope Francis as a bad shepherd, while many people see the bishops as bad shepherds. Many parishioners see pastors as bad shepherds, too, as we all know. But what about our own shepherding of those in our care? God calls us all to be shepherds; we are all called to care for one another. So, feel free to think of yourself as a shepherd rather than a sheep.
- C. Sr. Mary McGlone reminds us that shepherding even happens on the internet: “ ‘Woe to the shepherds who mislead and scatter my flock!’ Thus spoke Jeremiah about religious leaders around the year 600 B.C. Now, one does not have to be part of the clergy or a politician to mislead and scatter. [According to an NPR report in May](#), a mere 12 individuals could take credit for the majority of the fear-inducing disinformation that had been published by then about COVID-19 vaccinations.” (NCR Sunday Resources online, July 18, 2021) Such bad shepherds are responsible for millions of deaths, both here and around the globe.

**III. Good Shepherds**

- A. So what characterizes a good shepherd. Today's gospel says that when Jesus "disembarked and saw the vast crowd, his heart was moved with pity for them, for they were like sheep without a shepherd." Perhaps a better translation would be "his heart was moved with compassion for them."
- B. Mencius, a Chinese philosopher who lived several hundred years before Christ and was eager to show that there is good in everyone, said, "All people have a capacity for compassion. If people see a child about to fall into a well, they will, without exception, experience a feeling of alarm and distress. This is not because they know the child's parents, nor out of desire for praise ... nor out of dislike for the bad reputation that would ensue if they did not go to the rescue. From this we may conclude that without compassion one would not be a human being." (Kayala blog)
- C. Of course, we know that not all human beings exercise compassion. There's a new documentary that debuted at the Tribeca Film Festival last month about the ministry of Fr. James Martin. In an interview about the movie and his book *Building a Bridge*, Martin comments on the reactions to his book, which often included vicious personal attacks: "If I disagreed with somebody," he says, "I would never attack them personally. I wouldn't say you should go to hell, you're a terrible Catholic or you're a heretic. So that was kind of shocking. It revealed how much homophobia and hatred there is in the church, which was sad." (NCR, June 25-July 8, 2021, p. 9)
- D. And that type of personal attack is so common today in our country. People who display a Pride flag get death threats, as do politicians who voice an opinion that somebody dislikes. Public health workers receive similar threats for advocating for vaccines. Teachers get death threats from parents if they teach about racism. School board members get death threats from groups opposed to any discussion of America's problems or any mention of LGBTQ issues in the curriculum.
- E. Compassion seems in short supply these days, but the need for it is clearly evident. Imitating Christ is one way to nurture that characteristic. Flannery O'Connor, the insightful Catholic writer, lifted up the Christian dimension when she wrote: "You will have found Christ when you are concerned with other people's sufferings and not your own." (Kayala blog, 7-16-2018)

#### **IV. Conclusion**

- A. We are in desperate need of compassionate shepherds today. We need good shepherds in politics, people who will care for the whole flock and put the common good ahead of their own ambitions. We need good shepherds in business, leaders who recognize that their success really depends on their employees, the way they treat the environment, and the honesty with which they produce and market their products. And we need compassionate shepherds everywhere—in our families, in our churches, in our neighborhood groups, in our social gatherings, in our cities. We need people who will care for the sheep, for all those God has placed in our lives, and especially those who are most in need of our care.
- B. Let me conclude with a prayer to be good shepherds that came to me in an email recently: "Dear God, help us to reclaim our sense of compassion for others, even when we find it difficult to do so. May we treat our brothers and sisters as we would wish to be treated. You created each of us in your image, thus making everyone worthy of our love and compassion. Amen." (Pause + Pray, Franciscan Media, July 8, 2021)