

READINGS AND REFLECTIONS – 16TH SUNDAY YEAR B

First Reading

Jeremiah 23:1-6 (JB)

A reading from the prophet Jeremiah

'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.'

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 22

*The Lord is my shepherd;
there is nothing I shall want.*

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.

*The Lord is my shepherd;
there is nothing I shall want.*

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.

*The Lord is my shepherd;
there is nothing I shall want.*

You have prepared a banquet for me
in the sight of my foes.
My head you have anointed with oil;
my cup is overflowing.

*The Lord is my shepherd;
there is nothing I shall want.*

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.

*The Lord is my shepherd;
there is nothing I shall want.*

Second Reading Ephesians 2:13-18 (JB)

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the Ephesians

In Christ Jesus, you that used to be so far 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.

Gospel Mark 6:30-34 (JB)

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark

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.

REFLECTIONS ON THE READINGS

The society in which Jesus lived was not renowned for its compassion.

It was wary of and inhospitable to non-Jewish people, even to the point of despising them. Within its own ranks, there were certain sub-groups who were looked-down on, marginalised and spurned.

Those charged with caring for and looking after the people, cared more for themselves than for the people entrusted to them.

It has been like this for many, many years, and so the promise that God would give Israel a compassionate Shepherd-King who would rule with integrity, wisdom and honesty was a beacon of hope.

The Gospel presents Jesus as the fulfillment of this promise -- the shepherd-king who is overcome with compassion for the crowd.

Our lectionary translation – “took pity of them” – is weak; it does not really capture the meaning of the gospel text which says that his stomach was moved at the sight of their plight.

The Gospel tells us that “he set about to teach them at some length”. What he said is not recorded, but it would have been aimed at giving them hope and helping them to find meaning in their lives.

This overwhelming compassionate reaction of Jesus is presented many times in the Gospels; in his encounter with people in sorrow or in need, with people who were marginalised, oppressed, those suffering from illness and disease, or those trapped in a sinful cycle of exploiting others.

No one was excluded – not even the foreigners, such as the Samaritans with whom he was not supposed to associate, or the Roman occupiers and those who collaborated with them, all of whom he was supposed to hate and despise.

“Compassion” is the single word that best describes the ministry of Jesus on this earth. I suggest that compassion should also be the motivating force behind our own ministry to others.

As disciples of the Lord, we are called to be people able to empathise with the misfortunes of others, express that empathy, and insofar as possible seek to alleviate the misfortune.

Where people are marginalised and oppressed, we are called to reach out across the barriers that separate us.

Frequently we will not be in a position to fix whatever it is that is troubling the other person, but our compassion will make their suffering bearable, because it recognises their worth, their innate goodness, and the bonds of solidarity between us as children of the one God.

Our mere presence to them will touch their hearts and our compassion will be the sign of God continuing to establish a reign of integrity, honesty and wisdom in this world.

O God, patient and forbearing,
you alone know fully
the goodness of what you have made.

Strengthen our spirit when we are slow
and temper our zeal when we are rash,
that in your own good time
you may produce in us a rich harvest
from the seed you have sown and tended.

Amid the cares of our daily lives,
make us attentive to your voice
and alert to your presence,
that we may treasure your word above all else.

We make our prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever.
