

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

As people living in communities, societies, countries we always wish for sound leadership to guide and protect us and provide for our needs.

The point is, sound leadership is necessary for peace, justice, security, etcetera, in any community, in any society.

The life of our Christian communities depends, to a very large extent, on the quality of their spiritual leaders.

The first reading and the gospel of today describe the condition of God's people in the absence of sound leadership in Israel.

Prophet Jeremiah in the first reading condemned the shepherds, leaders of Israel for misleading and scattering the sheep in their care. He also spoke of God's restoration of good shepherds to his people.

As we know already the shepherd image is used in Scripture to describe God's special envoys; priests and kings who were supposed to tend the flock of God. They were required to lead the people with care. The lost they were to seek out and bring the strayed back. They were to bind up the injured and to heal the sick.

In short, the leaders, the shepherds of Israel we expected to give themselves in service of love for the people. Instead, we see in the reading that the shepherds; the king and priests were leading the people for their own gain, taking advantage of them.

We read, **"Woe to the shepherds who mislead and scatter the flock of my pasture, says the LORD...You have scattered my sheep and driven them away. You have not cared for them, but I will take care to punish your evil deeds... behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up a righteous shoot to David; as king he shall reign and govern wisely, he shall do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah shall be saved, Israel shall dwell in security."**

Through sound leadership God always does what is good for his people. He is concerned about our spiritual and material welfare.

The gospel of today speaks to us about the king-shepherd announced by Jeremiah in the first reading; Jesus Christ.

Following the return of the Twelve from their mission Jesus wanted them to have sometime to themselves but the people would not let them. They were coming and going in great numbers even at the deserted place they were milling around like sheep without a shepherd.

There were many self-proclaimed spiritual leaders around in those days: The Scribes, the Pharisees, the Jewish priests but like the shepherds condemned by Jeremiah in the first reading, they too looked after their own interest rather than after the good of the people. So, Jesus, the LORD our justice gave them what was their due by teaching them many things and next week we will him feed them.

What I would like to conclude by saying no matter who we are and what we do we should allow God to use us for the good for his people, for their spiritual and material welfare. Let us have compassion for people who get in our way needing our help even if they disrupt our cherished plans. Let us always make the effort to do what is just and right so that the people we encounter may experience the love and goodness of God in their lives. And as the last stanza of today's Psalm 23 reads wherever we find always let us allow goodness and kindness follow us all the days of our life.