

Commentary on the Readings for July 18, 2021  
The 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time

The theme of the Readings for today is about leadership. God is leading us through His Son, Jesus Christ, and Christ is appointing leaders within His Church. This should inspire us to accept this leadership and fulfill our role in God's Plan as well. Leadership is always a two-way situation or it becomes a dictatorship. As Catholics, we are familiar with God's role as Creator and Christ's role as Redeemer, but how well do we understand our role in God's Plan. As we have discussed here many times, God has given each of us some part to fill in His Plan of Salvation. Some people have prominent or significant roles to fill and others have smaller ones, each according to his talents or gifts; and God will hold each of us accountable for our assigned role, in particular, those who have been given the role of leader.

The First Reading is from the Prophet Jeremiah (23:1-6). Here, God is sending His Prophet Jeremiah to the leaders of the Jewish people near the end of the Monarchy. He uses the metaphor of a shepherd in referring to their leaders who were misleading the people into idolatry and abandoning the Mosaic Law. Through the Prophet, God promises to send a "true leader" who will lead the people according to a new covenant. This was not fulfilled until the coming of Jesus Christ and still those leaders would not accept Him.

The Responsorial Psalm is (23:1-6). This psalm is the famous "The Lord is my Shepherd" psalm of which we are all familiar. Although we understand the terms, "shepherd and sheep" which are used here in a metaphoric way, we can identify with them easily. Here, Jesus is the divine shepherd and we need to follow Him as readily as sheep follow a good shepherd, because only Jesus can lead us to the Father and heaven—the "green pastures."

The Second Reading is from St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians (2:13-18). In this passage, Paul is speaking to the Greek-speaking Jews who had recently converted to Christianity. He refers to them as "you who once were far off" because they followed the Mosaic Law to the letter but not the spirit, which could not bring them to eternal life with the Father. After they accepted Christ and His teachings and were baptized, they became a "new person" and part of the Body of Christ—the Church.

The Gospel Reading is taken from Mark (6:30-34). When the disciples, whom Jesus had sent out to preach, teach and heal had returned, they were tired and needed time to rest. Jesus understood this. He is very much aware of human needs and limits. In this story, He tries to get the apostles away from the crowds, but the people kept finding and following them for they had many needs, both physical and spiritual. Jesus saw this and put aside His need for rest and attended to their needs as a "Good Shepherd" would do.

Leadership is necessary whenever people come together for a common purpose. Someone has to be the leader, but that does not mean that everyone else can sit back and follow blindly. We have seen what that does in recent business and political scandals. Even in our spiritual life, we need to understand what the goal is and who our leaders are. We have a responsibility to praise them occasionally when they have done well and challenge them when we feel they are straying; but most of all we must keep our ear tuned to listen for the voice of Jesus calling us to Him. MFB