



# LIVING THE GOSPEL

**16<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time  
July 21 2024**

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**Theme: "Come away by yourselves to a lonely place, and rest a while"**

## **Gathering Prayer**

**All:** Show favor, O Lord, to your servants and mercifully increase the gifts of your grace, that, made fervent in hope, faith and charity, they may be ever watchful in keeping your commands. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

## **Exploring the Word**

### **Gospel Reading: Mark 6:30-34**

<sup>30</sup> The apostles returned to Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. <sup>31</sup> And he said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a lonely place, and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. <sup>32</sup> And they went away in the boat to a lonely place by themselves. <sup>33</sup> Now many saw them going, and knew them, and they ran there on foot from all the towns, and got there ahead of them. <sup>34</sup> As he went ashore he saw a great throng, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.

### **Gospel Focus**

We might feel some pity for Jesus here - after a busy stretch of ministry he attempts to retreat with the Apostles only to find that the crowds have walked to meet them. However, his response is not one of annoyance or impatience, justified as those reactions would be. He rather sees the need of those who are seeking him, and he responds to that need with compassion. He is able to do so in part because he does not operate from a scarcity mindset. It seems there is not enough time for both ministry and rest, but Jesus operates from a place of trust. In God his needs and ours will be abundantly met, and Jesus is able to share that generosity with those who are seeking him.

### **Gospel Reflection**

In ecumenical dialogues, today's second reading is often used to set forth the ideal of the visible oneness for which we long. How do peoples who are separated become united? Today's readings emphasize the role of compassionate leaders in the work of reconciliation. In the New Testament texts, the focus is on one person of Christ as the one who accomplishes oneness.

The first reading is an indictment of Israel's leaders who allowed the people to be "scattered" and "driven away" into exile. The contrast is great between their lack of care for the "flock" and God's complete provision for the people expressed in Psalm 23. The Divine Shepherd leads the "flock" with overflowing goodness and kindness to plentiful pasture, abundant food, rest from worry, and accompaniment in frightening times. In the gospel, we see this same tender care embodied in Jesus. He attends to the disciples' need to replenish after their first missionary journey and to the needs of the vast crowd for whom he has heartfelt compassion.

To us who live in a context where many in church ministry fall prey to the pressure of responding constantly to nonstop demands, it may seem that the returning apostles in today's gospel are longing for an overdue rest. The gospel context offers another possible interpretation.

The apostles have just returned from their first attempts at teaching and expelling evil spirits and their report to Jesus is probably an enthusiastic retelling of all the marvels they accomplished. Jesus invites them to a deserted place, the kind of place where he would customarily go apart to pray (Mark 1:35). Perhaps the disciples were in danger of becoming a bit too enamored of their own abilities to perform wonders. The deserted place will help them experience more deeply the divine compassion that calls them into mission and that is the source of all that they are able to do. From their ability to receive divine compassion in their own neediness, they become able to be the compassion of God toward others. Just so, in any work of reconciliation, the ability to experience compassion, that is, to "feel with" the other from the other's point of view, is crucial to moving toward oneness.

The author of Ephesians elaborates how "the dividing wall of enmity" between Jewish Christians ("those who were near") and Gentile Christians (those "who were far off") is broken down. Christ himself is that peace that brings unity (v.14). He makes peace by the costly giving of himself that put enmity to death (v.15), and finally, he preached peace (v.16).

For creating unity in our own day, we can emulate this pattern. We start with contemplative dwelling with the Source of our peace, allowing ourselves to be transformed into the very peace we desire. Secondly, making peace is costly; it demands crossing over dividing walls to listen deeply and with empathy to the "other," and being willing to engage in long processes of dialogue, clarifying where we have common ground and where we differ, and praying for the guidance of the Spirit to find the way through the impasses.

## **Old/New Testament links**

### **First Reading — Jeremiah 23:1-6**

<sup>1</sup> "Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!" says the LORD. <sup>2</sup> Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who care for my people: "You have scattered my flock, and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for your evil doings, says the LORD. <sup>3</sup> Then I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. <sup>4</sup> I will set shepherds over them who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be missing, says the LORD.

<sup>5</sup> "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. <sup>6</sup> In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.' "

### **Responsorial Psalm — Psalm 23:1-6**

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

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. In verdant pastures he gives me repose; beside restful waters he leads me; he refreshes my soul. **(R)**

He guides me in right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk in the dark valley I fear no evil; for you are at my side with your rod and your staff that give me courage. **(R)**

You spread the table before me in the sight of my foes; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. **(R)**

Only goodness and kindness follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for years to come. **(R)**

### **Second Reading — Ephesians 2:13-18**

<sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ. <sup>14</sup> For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, <sup>15</sup> by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, <sup>16</sup> and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end. <sup>17</sup> And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; <sup>18</sup> for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

### **Sharing and Discussion**

1. 'Come away by yourselves to a lonely place, and rest a while,' says the Lord. For what purpose did Jesus want his apostles to do that? Is this an essential practice in life?
2. Out of compassion, Jesus said that they were like sheep without a shepherd. What does it mean to be compassionate? How do we exercise compassion?
3. Jesus said, "...they were "like sheep without a shepherd." Is having a shepherd a necessary thing in society today? What would be his role?

### **Closing Prayer**

**All:** God of abundant peace, through your Son Jesus you assure us of a home in the kingdom of heaven. Receive our prayers that by following his example we might spread love and hope to all we meet. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Leader:** May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life.

**All:** Amen