

Homily of Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B, 2021

Jeremiah 23:1-6; Psalm 23:1-6; Ephesians 2:13-18; Mark 6:30-34

The time Jeremiah prophesied in Israel was a time of religious and moral crises. The political rulers and religious leaders were deep in corruption and injustice. The poor were neglected and oppressed. The true God was no longer worshipped with seriousness. Worship of foreign gods became a common practice. In the first reading, Jeremiah confronted the rulers and leaders for their derailment: "Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the flock of my pasture - oracle of the Lord. Therefore, thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, against the shepherds who shepherd my people: 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" (Jeremiah 23:1-2).

The first reading, accurately, captures the picture of the situation today in crises ridden countries like Nigeria. The rulers in those countries destroy and scatter the people and drive them away. The people are praying and waiting for God's promise: "I myself will gather the remnant of my flock from all the lands to which I have banished them and bring them back to their folds; there they shall be fruitful and multiply. I will raise up shepherds for them who will shepherd them so that they need no longer fear or be terrified; none shall be missing - oracle of the Lord" (Jeremiah 23:3-4).

We pray for religious, economic, and political shepherds who are a fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy, the days when righteous and just rulers reign and govern wisely; and when the people will dwell in security (Jeremiah 23:6).

We pray for religious, political, and economic shepherds who are "Repairer of Broken Walls, and Restorer of Streets and Dwellings" (Isaiah 58:12); the shepherds who have the mind of Christ, who break down the dividing wall of enmity and establish peace; who preach peace to those far off and peace to those who are near (second reading, Ephesians 2:14-18).

Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of Jeremiah's prophecy. Unlike the shepherds during the time of Jeremiah, when Jesus saw the vast crowd, "his heart was moved with pity for them, for they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he began to teach them many things." We pray for religious, political, and economic shepherd who are compassionate in their leadership.

We pray, too, that we become a fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy since, in one way or another, we have leadership roles in our homes, relationships, churches, associations, work places, and responsibilities. Wherever and whatever leadership role we find ourselves, we pray to have the mind of Christ and be "Repairer of Broken Walls, and Restorer of Streets and Dwellings," and be able break down dividing walls of enmity and establish peace.

Wherever and whatever leadership role we find ourselves, we pray to "govern wisely" and be compassionate. Without compassion, we cannot govern or judge wisely. That is why Jesus tells us to "Be compassionate just as your Father is compassionate" (Luke 6:36).

We conclude this reflection by praying together the beautiful psalm of today, Psalm 23:

The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I lack.
In green pastures he makes me lie down;
to still waters he leads me; he restores my soul.
He guides me along right paths for the sake of his name.
Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil, for you are with me;
your rod and your staff comfort me.
You set a table before me in front of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
Indeed, goodness and mercy will pursue me all the days of my life;
I will dwell in the house of the Lord for endless days.
Amen.