

## Homily of Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B, 2024

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... 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 disturbing situation today in crises ridden countries. The rulers in the crises ridden countries destroy and scatter the people and drive them away. Hundreds of thousands of people are dying of sickness, hunger, poverty, and violence. Thousands of people are fleeing their homelands, and many are dying across deserts, in seas, in captivity, and in detentions. Thousands of people are forced to surrender themselves to the humiliation of human traffickers and the humiliation of seeking refugee status and asylum status in foreign lands. We continue to pray and wait for God's promise: "I myself will gather the remnant of my flock from all the lands ... 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." (Jeremiah 23:3-4).

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

Unlike the wicked 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 to have religious, political, and economic shepherds 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 be "Repairers of Broken Walls, and Restorers of Streets and Dwellings." In our leadership roles, we pray, as St. Paul encourages us to have the mind of Christ and be able to break down dividing walls of enmity and establish peace.

Wherever and whatever leadership role we find ourselves, we pray to be compassionate like Jesus, who instructs us to "Be compassionate as [our] Father is compassionate" (Luke 6:36).

Let us pray to become instruments of peace and progress instead of tools of crises and destruction. We pray with St. Francis of Assisi:

"Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.  
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
where there is injury, pardon;  
where there is doubt, faith;  
where there is despair, hope;  
where there is darkness, light;  
and where there is sadness, joy."

Amen.

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