

SPIRITUALITY

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

John 10:27

R/. Alleluia, alleluia.
 My sheep hear my voice, says the
 Lord;
 I know them, and they follow me.
 R/. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Mark 6:30-34; L107B

**The apostles gathered
 together with Jesus
 and reported all they had
 done and taught.**

**He said to them,
 “Come away by
 yourselves to a
 deserted place and
 rest a while.”**

**People were coming and
 going in great numbers,
 and they had no opportunity even to
 eat.**

**So they went off in the boat by
 themselves to a deserted place.**

**People saw them leaving and many
 came to know about it.**

**They hastened there on foot from all
 the towns
 and arrived at the place before them.**

**When he disembarked and 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.**



Reflecting on the Gospel

The prophet Jeremiah sounded a warning over twenty-five hundred years ago, chastening those who would mislead the Lord’s flock: “Woe to the shepherds who mislead and scatter the flock of my pasture, says the LORD.” It is also a current problem, made tragically clear in the crisis of clergy sex abuse and its mis-handling by so many of our bishops, laid bare in the media for all to see. It is a reality that drives people out of parishes, and even from the church.

Each of us is responsible before God for our behavior, but those who have been assigned to care for the people of God, the shepherds who have been asked to guide the sheep, have a heavy burden when the sheep are scattered and driven away due to the actions, or lack of action, by the shepherds. God chastises the shepherds who have “scattered my sheep and driven them away.”

Through Jeremiah, God promised that the scattered “remnant of my flock” would be gathered up and good shepherds raised up to guide them. While the historical context of the Babylonian exile

is clear in these promises to Israel through the prophet Jeremiah, the eschatological context is also evident in God’s promise to “raise up a righteous shoot to David,” who “shall reign and govern wisely.” This promised Messiah was raised up as the Good Shepherd not just for the people of Israel, but also for all of the sheep who did not belong to that one fold (John 10:16).

And it was through the life of the Good Shepherd that we “who once were far off have become near by the blood of Christ” (Eph 2:13). The shepherd not only protected his sheep, but gave up his own life to bring us to life eternal. This compassion for the flock, both those who knew the voice of the shepherd and those who were not yet aware of their heritage as God’s people, enlivened all that Jesus did in his mission. His work was for the life of his flock.

Jesus also raised up shepherds to continue to guide the flock. After being sent out to evangelize, the apostles reported back to Jesus on “all they had done and taught.” The Good Shepherd’s compassion extended to these protégés, who Jesus knew needed rest, so he took them to a deserted place.

Yet Jesus, when he “saw the vast crowd,” did not turn from the flock and focus on the shepherds. Jesus’s compassion was poured out on the sheep, “for they were like sheep without a shepherd.” Jesus’s compassion instead was a model for the shepherds who would continue his mission. In responding to the needs of the flock, Jesus gives us the priorities of the Good Shepherd: serve the people; care for the people; build up the people. These are the priorities not just of the Good Shepherd; they must be the priorities also of the successors to the apostles, who have been called to shepherd the people.

There are no excuses for shepherds who scatter the flock and drive people away. It is not that there is not forgiveness from God for all those who repent, for sin stalks all of the sheep of the flock. But when shepherds are unable to bear the burden of caring for the sheep, protecting the sheep, and even aid in the destruction of the sheep, they will indeed be forgiven when they genuinely repent. Still, even with forgiveness, they must never be allowed to guard the

sheep any longer. It is for this reason that Pope Francis has recently established tribunals to deliberate on negligence among bishops.

All of us stumble, but true shepherds do not repeatedly put the sheep, especially the little ones, in harm's way, time after time, year after year, and then claim to be doing the work of the Lord. The Good Shepherd gave himself up for the sheep; woe to those shepherds who give up the sheep to protect themselves.

Focusing the Gospel

Key words and phrases: [H]is heart was moved with pity for them, / for they were like sheep without a shepherd.

To the point: Many places in the Old Testament refer to the people of God as a "flock." Psalm 95 calls the people to worship the Lord stating, "For he is our God, / we are the people he shepherds, / the sheep in his hands" (95:7; NABRE). This image of a shepherd and his sheep would have been a meaningful one to the Israelites. Not only did many of the great leaders of the Hebrew Bible tend sheep (such as Abraham, Moses, and King David), but the people would also be intimately familiar with a shepherd's role in the lives of the sheep. In today's gospel, Jesus looks upon the crowds who have followed him as sheep without a shepherd. They are desperately seeking the nourishment, security, and direction that only Jesus, the Son of God can provide.

Connecting the Gospel

to the first reading: The first reading from the prophet Jeremiah is addressed to the kings and prophets of Israel who have failed in their role as shepherds of God's people. Instead of protecting and guiding the sheep, these individuals have "scattered" and "driven [them] away." In the face of their perfidy, God proclaims, "I myself will gather the remnant of my flock." In John's gospel, Jesus identifies himself as "the good shepherd" (10:11) who will "lay down [his] life for the sheep" (10:15; NABRE). In the final verses of the reading from Jeremiah, we as Christians find another link to Jesus as the one who will "do what is just and right in the land" so that "Judah shall be saved" and "Israel shall dwell in security."

to experience: While we find comfort in knowing that God is our shepherd, today's readings also include warning to those who have abused the power and authority that they hold over others. Who are the people in your life you have been given to shepherd? How do you strive to take on this role with humility, mercy, and justice?

Connecting the Responsorial Psalm

to the readings: Today's psalm is attributed to David, the great king of Israel, who is "tending the sheep" (1 Sam 16:11) when we are first introduced to him in the Bible. This psalm offers details about shepherding that only a shepherd would know. For the shepherd, the welfare of his sheep is a constant preoccupation. He is responsible for their rest and their activity, their nourishment, and their health. In today's gospel, Jesus intends to find a quiet place the apostles could "rest a while." But when he sees the crowds longing to be fed with his life-giving words, he cannot turn his back on them. And so, just as a good shepherd would, he sets about tending to their needs.

to psalmist preparation: How do you experience God's love and care for you as that of a shepherd tending his sheep?

PROMPTS FOR FAITH-SHARING

Through the prophet Jeremiah, God proclaims, "I will appoint shepherds for [my flock] who will shepherd them." Which bishops, priests, deacons, religious and lay ministers have shepherded you well in life?

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Today's psalm is the well-beloved Psalm 23. At this moment in your life, which verse calls to you the most?

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In his letter to the Ephesians, St. Paul preaches that all become one in Christ. Where are there places of division in your parish community and how might Jesus be calling you to work for unity?

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In the gospel Jesus invites the disciples to "[c]ome away by yourselves . . . and rest a while." What spiritual practices do you turn to when facing burnout?

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