

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time - Lectionary: 107

Reading I - Jer 23:1-6

Woe to the shepherds who mislead and scatter the flock of my pasture, says 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. I myself will gather the remnant of my flock from all the lands to which I have driven them and bring them back to their meadow; there they shall increase and multiply. I will appoint shepherds for them who will shepherd them so that they need no longer fear and tremble; and none shall be missing, says the LORD.

Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up a righteous shoot to David; as king he shall reign and govern wisely, he shall do what is just and right in the land.

In his days Judah shall be saved, Israel shall dwell in security.

This is the name they give him: "The LORD our justice."

Responsorial Psalm - Ps 23:1-3, 3-4, 5, 6 - R. (1) The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.;

Reading II - Eph 2:13-18

Brothers and sisters: In Christ Jesus you who once were far off have become near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, he who made both one and broke down the dividing wall of enmity, through his flesh, abolishing the law with its commandments and legal claims, that he might create in himself one new person in place of the two, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile both with God, in one body, through the cross, putting that enmity to death by it. He came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near, for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

Gospel - Mk 6:30-34

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.

Human Expectations / Human Limits

We see Jesus as the perfect good shepherd who is teaching, healing and, feeding. And yet, we see him at times leaving the people, despite their demands, and going away to pray.

Today we read in the gospel, as the apostles return from their missionary activities, about Jesus inviting his disciples to a quiet place to rest. There are people present who want to see Jesus, be seen by Jesus, be healed, be taught, be fed... but Jesus insists on going to a quiet place. Of course, we also read about the crowds who have gone ahead of them and are awaiting their arrival. We see here an example of the kind of tension that exists for Jesus, the apostles and really it is experienced as well in the life of every committed Christian. There is the need to draw away to a quiet place, recharge one's batteries, reflect on and evaluate activities, regenerate one's spiritual energy. At the same time, there are constant demands upon our time, we have commitments and responsibilities. This calls for discernment: there will be times when, with difficulty, we know we should say 'Yes'. There will be other times when, despite the criticism it may generate, we ought to say 'No'. We need to be available but there is no absolute availability. We are limited by our humanity.

Prayer and Action: The Two Poles of Christian Life

Jesus' Apostles had completed their first successful missionary endeavor. And how does Christ respond when his missionaries return from their exciting and busy adventure? He takes them aside to rest, to be with him again in the quiet intimacy of their small community.

The lesson is clear, Christians (especially the active ones who are energetically engaged in evangelizing the world around them), need to balance their activity with contemplation, with time spent in personal conversation with the Lord. We need to recharge our spiritual batteries. Only our friendship with Christ can supply us with the strength and wisdom we need to be truly successful, successful not just in the roles we play, but in who we are beneath those roles. Without prayer, study, and time alone with God, our well will soon run dry – we will have nothing substantial to offer others.

But without action, without giving freely to others what we have freely received from God, our spiritual waters will become stagnant, lifeless – like a lake with no outlet. Contemplation and action, prayer and work – such was Christ's way, so such should be every Christian's way.

Finding the Balance

St Benedict of Nursia, the father of monasticism in the West, used a motto that sums up perfectly this Lesson: Ora et labora. Pray and work: These like the two sides of the coin of our Christian life. We are called to become close friends of Jesus Christ, each one of us, and we can only do that if we develop our prayer life. But we are also called to be his fellow soldiers, ambassadors and agents of his everlasting Kingdom, and that means we should be putting our talents, time, energy, and creativity into doing things that will make this world a better place, a place more worthy of our King.

Have I found the right balance between "ora" and "labora" in my life? Each one of us needs to find the balance that goes with our personality and life-circumstances. God will help us, but it's up to us to get the ball rolling.