

16th Sunday of the Year

Jer 23:1-6, Eph 2:13-18, Mk 6:30-34

Like Jesus, we too are called to a mission of compassion for the ‘sheep’ without a shepherd; but this mission should flow and find direction from our close communion with God.

The first lesson, we learn from the message of today’s gospel is that neither weariness nor retirement should make us to stop our missionary service till the end of our life. Of course, there is tiresomeness in our work, but it is not an excuse to give up or to back-off. St. Paul says that we should never grow weary in doing what is right, for we shall reap at harvest time, if we do not give up (Gal 6:9). He repeats it again when he urges the believers in Thessalonica not to be weary in doing what is right (2 Thess 3:13). Now and then, we hear this refrain from some of our elders, who rendered wonderful services in family, society, community and the Church: “In our time, we did our part in the best way possible. Now it is up to others to continue. Let us see how they will fare.” This attitude gives the impression that they are either tired of doing good or have retired from doing good. There is no retirement from the twofold mission reported by the apostles to Jesus on their return from mission work: doing deeds of mercy and teaching people God’s ways as Jesus did.

The word ‘shepherd’ is used in the OT first of all for God, then for kings, priests and prophets; in the NT for Jesus and the Church leaders. God in the OT and Jesus in the gospel severely rebuke the false and wicked ‘shepherds’. But when it comes to broken-hearted, confused and disoriented people, Jesus had a soft heart. Jesus noticed human brokenness from a close angle. He could sense their ‘lost-ness,’ ‘scattered-ness’ and inner longing. He saw how they were wandering aimlessly without any selfless leaders to guide them to right path. His compassion for their condition led him to put their needs above his convenience, weariness, or need for rest. For him, it was not a question about what is convenient and comfortable to oneself, but what God wanted him to do for the needy people at that time. It was a question of faithfulness to God’s mission. What about us?

Today the world is suffering more than before from a lack of selfless and honest leaders with integrity. How much the world longs for leaders, who will place the needs and concerns of the poor and the voiceless above their greed for power and wealth! How much it needs leaders,

who are moved with compassion for the plight of the underprivileged and the marginalized! How much it needs leaders who place the needs of these people above their or their political party's benefit or profit. When we watch TV and read newspapers, we daily learn about the world's urgent need for genuine leaders who could serve their people without the taint of scams, kickbacks and graft cases attached to their names.

Like Jesus, we are called to show compassion to the 'sheep' who are without a shepherd to lead them. Like him our mission entails not only doing deeds of mercy but also teaching about God's love and mercy as we heard at the end of today's gospel. Today Jesus invites us to be shepherds of the sheep. The sheep without a shepherd cannot find the way, cannot get guidance and counsel, cannot find meadows, and cannot defend themselves against 'thieves and bandits' (Jn 10:8) or against 'wild animals' (Eze 34:5).

There are many poor and powerless people, who cannot defend themselves against the exploitation and unjust treatment of the powerful; those who cannot fight for their rights, when they are trampled because of lack of financial resources, lack of organization and ignorance of laws that protect their rights. So many 'thieves and bandits' loot the funds that are allotted for the welfare of the poor people. There are so many youth who are disoriented in life or have no aim in life. The 'wild beasts' (bad company, bad influence of the mass media) spoil their character. So many poor and voiceless people have no genuine and selfless leaders among them. Their so-called leaders can be bought over and duped by the powerful ones. When we look at this situation, are we moved with compassion?

Prayer

Compassionate Lord, today we bring before you what we have experienced in our mission-journey. Filled with your Spirit we would like to take home what we have learned from you. Shepherd us Lord, beyond our greed and selfish desires, so that, we may be moved with compassion at the condition of those sheep wandering aimlessly. Grant that, we may become true shepherds for such people after your own heart. O Lord of the harvest, send good and dedicated leaders in the world, the Church and local community to take a special care of the strayed, scattered and strayed 'sheep.' Amen.