

July 18, 2021

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Jer 23:1-6

Eph 2:13-18

Mk 6:30-34

GROW: Portrayals of Jesus as a shepherd who cares for sheep often depict him carrying a sheep on his shoulders or holding a lamb in his arms. Those images are a source of great comfort, as is today's psalm: "The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want." But they don't quite capture just what hard work being a shepherd involves: tending to the flock in all kinds of weather, when the pastures are anything but verdant; waking in the wee hours to care for ewes and newborn lambs; watching some thrive and others die; not to mention being the poster child for the oft-quoted "smell of sheep." The crowd in today's Gospel lacked such a shepherd to tend and care for them, and thus "[Jesus'] heart was moved with pity for them." There are times when circumstances and events can trick us into thinking that an earthly power or perfectly-principled worldview will save us. That is when we need the Lord as our shepherd the most. Only he can save us; only he has saved us. So, in those times when we may feel lost, we can bring it all to Jesus in prayer. He is the Shepherd who knows what we need.

GO: I don't know about you, but I rarely miss a meal. When I do, I get cranky. And I don't like crowds of any kind outside of Wrigley Field. So imagine how exhausted Jesus and the disciples must have felt when, because crowds followed them day and night, they had "no opportunity even to eat." Even when they tried to get away and rest awhile, a vast crowd appeared. Rather than turn away, however, Jesus began to teach them – for they were hurting and in need of his care. Today's Gospel encourages us to be shepherds to one another, keeping others close. Pope Francis said it well during Holy Week 2013: "Following Jesus means learning to come out of ourselves ... to be the first to take a step toward our brothers and our sisters, especially those who are the most distant, those who are forgotten, those who are most in need of understanding, comfort and help." As we ourselves have been led by the Shepherd, we reach out to others who are in need of care.

ACCOMPANY: Find ways, large or small, to "tend the flock" of your family, parish, workplace or community: Write a note to a person who is grieving, invite a quiet co-worker to lunch, provide a listening ear to children or aging parents, introduce yourself to a newcomer at your parish.