

16th Sunday per Annum - B
Jeremiah 23:1-6;
Ephesians 2:13-18;
Mark 6:30-34
Little Flower - 7/19/15

My Brothers and Sisters,

As good as it is to go on vacation, it is equally good to return home. In today's Gospel, Jesus said to the apostles, "*Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.*" I only partially took Jesus' advice. I did rest a while. Although the weather was not the best, I was able to spend quality time with friends. However, the place was anything but deserted. At one point, there were twenty people living in the house. Once again, I want to thank everyone who made my 40th anniversary of ordination celebration as wonderful as it was.

In all seriousness, in today's Gospel, Jesus preaches self-care. Jesus reminds all of us of our need for rest. It seems to me that this is one of the big problems of our society today. Everyone is so busy; everyone's life is so hectic. Very few people take the time to really slow down and cherish the beauty of life and creation.

Both today's Old Testament reading and today's Gospel address two issues in church leadership. God, through Jeremias, mourns or condemns shepherds who mislead and scatter his people or who fail to care for his people. In recent times, we have witnessed too many examples of both: sexual abuse and the cover-up of sexual abuse, the German "Bishop of Bling" who spent an astronomical amount of money on his residence, and judgmental bishops and priests who create divisions within the community.

In today's Gospel, Jesus was moved with pity for the people who were like sheep without a shepherd. The bigger problem today is the lack of priests and the age of our priests. There is no need for me to cite statistics. You know as well as I do that we do not have enough priests to staff our parishes adequately. You know as well as I do that we have an aging clergy.

One of Pope Francis' consistent themes is that bishops, priests, and other church ministers are called to be shepherds like Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who seeks the lost sheep, who comforts them, and who leads them to green pastures. Pope Francis emphasizes that shepherds need to go out to the margins and the marginalized and that shepherds need to have the smell of the sheep on them.

All of us are called to bring Jesus to others and to bring others to Jesus. Today's reading from Paul's letter to the Ephesians captures the significance of Jesus. It is Jesus on the cross who unites God and us and unites us among ourselves. The vertical cross bar links heaven and earth. The horizontal crossbar embraces all people. Jesus is our peace who has made all of us one to reconcile all of us with God in one body through the cross.

My brothers and sisters, the primary effect of sin, both original sin and personal sin, is alienation from God, others, the world, and ourselves. Therefore, the primary effect of salvation is reconciliation with God, others, the world, and ourselves. If we are going to be Christian leaders in the world as we are all called to be, we have to work hard to bring people together, to tear down the walls and barriers that separate people from one another. We have to do our best to build bridges and create inclusive communities.