

16th Sunday per Annum - B
Jeremiah 23:1-6;
Ephesians 2::13-18;
Mark 6: 30-34
Little Flower - 7/22/18

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today's reading from Paul's Letter to the Ephesians captures Jesus' mission more clearly than almost any other passage in the New Testament: dying on the cross, Jesus reconciled us with God and with one another. Harvard poet Archibald MacLeish once wrote that symbols speak to us more powerfully than ideas. The cross is the perfect symbol of reconciliation. By dying on the cross, Jesus reconciled us with God. The vertical bar captures the bond between heaven and earth. By dying on the cross, Jesus reconciled us with one another. The horizontal bar represents Jesus' embrace of all people.

Today's reading from Isaiah and today's Gospel refer to two problems within the communities: false shepherds and the lack of shepherds. In today's divided Church, some have accused the Pope himself of being a false shepherd. Pope Francis, coming from Argentina, is our first Third World Pope. What we in the First World often forget is that a majority of practicing Catholics today are in Third World, and he brings a Third World perspective to the Church. In my opinion, the false shepherds are those who are sowing division within the church by claiming theological and/or moral superiority over others.

Today the greater problem in the United States is the lack of priests. This year we had three priests retire, and only one priest was ordained. Actually, a fourth priest planned to retire but postponed retirement because there was no one to replace him. What defines us as Catholic is that we are a sacramental church. The biggest threat to the Church is that if we do not have sufficient priests, Catholics will be deprived of the sacraments.

When we talk about shepherds, parents are called to be good shepherds of their children. They are called to feed or nurture their children with love. However, they are also called to guide their children's formation and education.

The first way they do this is by the example they set. Children learn what they live and live what they learn. The second way they do this is by the guidance they give their children and the expectations they have for their children. In *All Grown Up and No Place to Go*, the author makes the point that children, especially as they get older, will make their own choices, but today many parents fail to provide clear standards of right and wrong against which children can make their choices. Third, Sister of Providence and clinical psychologist Sr. Anne Doherty once suggested that parents need to teach their children three life skills: to reflect, to have reverence, and to reconcile.

In the blessing of parents after the baptism of an infant, we remind them that they are the first teachers in the ways of faith and pray that they will be the best of teachers. Children need formal religious education. Parents of our public school students need to make Sunday morning religious education a priority. Finally, I know some of you may be offended by this. I find it hard to understand the number of active practicing Catholic parents who do not insist that their middle school and high school children attend Mass every Sunday but instead allow them to make their own decisions concerning Mass attendance when in so many other areas they do not allow them to make their own decisions.

My brothers and sisters, in today's Gospel, Jesus said, "*Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.*" Recently I have read reflections that used this verse to theologially argue the importance of vacations and/or retreats. However, I think it is reminding us we all need time with ourselves to think and to reflect. As Sr. Anne Doherty has suggested, reflection, reverence, and reconciliation are keys to our becoming the-best-version-of-ourselves.