

16th Sunday per Annum - B
Jeremiah 23:1-6;
Ephesians 2:13-18;
Mark 6:30-34
Little Flower - 7/18/21

My Brothers and Sisters,

As good as it is to go away on vacation, it is always good to come home!

Today's second reading from Paul's Letter to the Ephesians is one of the most important passages in the New Testament. Paul writes that Jesus came into the world to reconcile us to God and to one another through the cross. In fact, the cross is the perfect symbol of reconciliation. The vertical bar represents our reconciliation with God. The horizontal bar represents our reconciliation with one another.

Although this passage refers to the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles with one another and with God, Paul wrote to the Galatians, "*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus*" [Gal. 3:28]. Today Paul would probably add racial, ethnic, national, and religious reconciliation.

Paul wrote that Jesus reconciled us in one body. It seems to me that the phrase *one body* can refer to two realities. One is the reality of Christ himself. Since he has both a divine and a human nature, we first are reconciled in his person. This reconciliation was sealed by his death on the cross, i.e., his broken body and his blood poured out, that reconciled us with God and one another. However, it is equally true that the goal of his reconciling death and resurrection was to make us one body, one Church, in which all are welcome. Are our hearts open to all?

Our relationships with God and others are our most important relationships. However, we also have a relationship with ourselves and our world. We are often alienated from ourselves. For example, we often feel pulled in too many directions. Soul and body are often alienated. Physical illness is a form of alienation from ourselves. More than anything sin alienates us from ourselves. St. Paul wrote, "*For I do not do what I want, but I do what I hate*" [Rom. 7:15]. We are alienated from our world. Global warming certainly poses a threat to humankind. Jesus' death on the cross also reconciles us with ourselves and the world.

At the same time, all of us are called to be healers and reconcilers. One of my favorite passages is from Matthew's Gospel: "*Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift*" [Mt. 5:23-24]. Note what Jesus says and what he does not say. Jesus does not say that if we have wronged someone, we should go and be reconciled. He says that if a brother or sister has anything against us—it does not matter who is at fault—we should take the initiative to reconcile.

If we really want to be healers, reconcilers, and bridge builders, the most important thing we can do is to stop judging others. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus warns us multiple times not to judge others. If we want to stop judging, we have to also stop being hypercritical. As St. Paul wrote to the Romans, "*Love each other as much as brothers [and sisters] should, and have a profound respect for each other*" [12:10; British JB, 1966].

My brothers and sisters, in today's first reading, God through Jeremiah talks about good shepherds and bad shepherds. One of the reasons the Church is so divided today is because many Catholics have strong feelings about Pope Francis. While I was on vacation, someone asked what I thought about Pope Francis. My answer was very simple: he is the Pope. This does not mean that everyone will agree with everything he says and does. The priest who spoke at our recent convocation made the point that God gives the Church the Pope it needs at any given time.