

Homily for July 23, 2000  
16th Sunday in Ordinary Time Cycle B

By Father Charles Bowes

Jeremiah 23:1-6  
Ephesians 2:13-18  
Mark 6:30-34

## *We are both shepherds and sheep that need the Lord Jesus.*

There is an old story, but true: two women in a small Midwestern town were discussing a recent marriage. And one of them said, "I just can't believe it. Her parents brought her up a good Christian and then she goes and marries a Catholic."

Yes, Catholics are Christians. So are Protestants. So are the Orthodox. So are the Fundamentalists. In England there are many who prefer to be described as Anglo-Catholic, not Protestant. And while the word "Protestant" in the most general sense is used for all those churches after the Reformation who do not accept the head-ship of the Pope and Rome, there are many such churches who prefer the word "Evangelical." They no longer protest: they preach and witness the gospel. And so, there are many names for the people who believe that Jesus Christ is at the center of all Christian faiths.

So why the divisions? ...Especially when we hear such appealing statements as the one from St. Paul today, speaking of Jesus Christ in Ephesians chapter 2, "It is he who is our peace and has made the two of us one." He even says, "Christ has broken down the barrier of hostility that has kept us apart." And yet the

divisions are real – the effect of sin continues and the words of Jesus in Mark chapter 6 ring true: "They were like sheep without a shepherd..."

Is it any wonder that the words of Jeremiah chapter 23 would be so poignant today – as if to say the good Lord has had enough of this confusion among shepherds and sheep and is going to take charge: "I myself will gather the remnant of my flock from all of the lands to which I have driven them and bring them back to their meadow....I will appoint shepherds for them who will shepherd them so that they need no longer fear and tremble; and none shall be missing." You and I are both shepherds and sheep...those who lead and those who need tending. Shepherding is a daunting and treacherous task, not only for church leaders, but for all parents and every giver of care.

Lest we get disheartened, the manner of Jesus in Mark chapter 6 is instructive. He is gentle with his bunglers: "Come by yourselves to an out of the way place and rest a little," he says. And he is compassionate toward the people. "He pitied them, for they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them at great length."

Let us never forget, we who are both shepherds and sheep, what the teaching is all about, what the message means, what the Church is for, what life

amounts to....St. Paul says it so well: "It is he who is our peace and who made us one by breaking down the barrier of hostility that kept us apart. In his own flesh he abolished the law with its commands and precepts, to create in himself one new man from us who had been two, and to make peace, reconciling both of us to God in one body through the cross which put enmity to death."

There are still divisions among us – separations, within our Catholic Church, within our own parish between those who see things differently – but at every Eucharist we come together to go through the motions of oneness in bread and wine, cup and plate, so that we who are at the table become what is on the table – the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ broken and shared for the world. And if this kind of world makes our continued blunders embarrassing and arduous, well, then that is the way things are. And if we fail, we need to confess that failure – not because it is good to wallow in guilt, but because knowing where we should be going is the first step toward getting there. Let us pray: Lord, enable us to know how to shepherd and when we ourselves need tending...we ask this in Jesus's name. Amen.

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