

16th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year B

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Sources:

SCB: ([St Charles](#))

SH: ([David Scott & Scott Hahn](#))

Ben XVI: (Benedict – [10/05/11](#))

RC: ([Cantalamessa](#))

1st Reading - Jeremiah 23:1-6 - Woe to the shepherds who mislead and scatter the flock of my pasture, says the LORD. Therefore, thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, against the shepherds who shepherd my people: You have scattered my sheep and driven them away. You have not cared for them, but I will take care to punish your evil deeds. I myself will gather the remnant of my flock from all the lands to which I have driven them and bring them back to their meadow; there they shall increase and multiply. I will appoint shepherds for them who will shepherd them so that they need no longer fear and tremble; and none shall be missing, says the LORD.

Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up a righteous shoot to David; as king he shall reign and govern wisely, he shall do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah shall be saved, Israel shall dwell in security. This is the name they give him: "The LORD our justice."

SCB:

- Jeremiah is classed as the second of the four major prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, & Daniel). They are called “major” because of the length of the works attributed to them. Jeremiah is another of the reluctant prophets – he frequently protests, in his conversations with God, his dislike of proclaiming the message of destruction. He lived at the same time as Ezekiel (who we studied two weeks ago) and also at the same time as Zephaniah, Nahum, & Baruch (who was his secretary). Jeremiah came from a priestly family and was called by God as an adolescent (628 B.C.). His ministry lasted about 40 years. In order to make it clear that it is God’s words he is reporting, he uses the phrase “says the Lord” 338 times in his writing.
- At the beginning of Jeremiah’s ministry we find that Palestine is divided into two kingdoms: Israel in the north and Judah in the south. Part of Israel is a province of Assyria and the rest, along with Judah, is an Assyrian vassal state. The Assyrians had been the leading power in the near east for about 200 years and as a result of political influence Judah has experienced a resurgence of idolatry.

The Assyrian empire, however, had crumbled and after about 625 B.C. there was no effective Assyrian government in Palestine. In 621 B.C. the Book of the Law was discovered in the Temple and Josiah (king 639-609 B.C.) led a thorough reform in Judah which extended into the northern kingdom. This was a move of independence and it must be assumed that a number of people had remained faithful to God's covenant and supported the king. During Josiah's reign a solemn ceremony was conducted and the Mosaic covenant was renewed. There followed total destruction of all the high places where idolatrous practices were performed which kept Jerusalem as a unique cultic center. Josiah died in 609 B.C. (some historians think he was assassinated while others believe he died in battle). His son Jehoahaz was proclaimed king by the people but 3 months later was taken prisoner and brought to Egypt. Jehoiakim was installed as king by Pharaoh Necco III. Jeremiah upbraided him for his servility to the Egyptians, saying it would cause his downfall and ruin the country. Jeremiah had not favored acts against the Medes and had prophesied that the Babylonians would prevail and that Jerusalem would be destroyed. In 605 B.C. all Syria and Palestine came under the control of Babylon and their king, Nebuchadnezzar.

- When Jehoiakim died in 597 (probably assassinated) he was succeeded by his son Jehoiachin who 3 months later surrendered to the Babylonians and was deported along with the queen mother, the entire court, many nobles and people of every class except the poorest (Ezekiel was among these exiles). Zedekiah was installed as the newest (and last) king of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar. Today's reading is an oracle about this last king. Jeremiah and Baruch had stayed behind during the deportation but later were taken by some of their countrymen to Egypt. The temple of Solomon was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. Jewish tradition has it that Jeremiah was starved to death by his fellow exiles.
- God Himself is taking control; the rulers have failed in their job.
- The term "the days are coming" is simply a means of calling attention to a very solemn proclamation.
- This is a word play on Zedekiah's name. Zedekiah means "my justice is God" and here the Messiah is given the name "God is our justice." Isaiah had already given a similar name to this future king "Emmanuel" (God is with us) (Isaiah 7:14). Justice means both God's saving present and action.
- The ideal kingship (one which will realize the blessings of the covenant) can be seen in Psalms 2, 45, 72, 89, & 110. Prophets in dark times when kings were unfaithful, recalled this and promised its realization in the future using terms similar to those of Jeremiah here (Isaiah 9:5-6; 11:1-9; Micah 5:1-5; Amos 9:11; Hosea 3:5).
- Like his predecessors, Jeremiah predicts the restoration of the Davidic dynasty, not necessarily politically, but on the level of the religious and moral obligations of the covenant. "Prophets are like fingers, not like faces. We are not meant to look at them but to the reality to which they point."

Psalm 23:1-3, 3-4, 5, 6 - The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. In verdant pastures he gives me repose; beside restful waters he leads me; he refreshes my soul.

He guides me in right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk in the dark valley I fear no evil; for you are at my side with your rod and your staff that give me courage.

You spread the table before me in the sight of my foes; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

Only goodness and kindness follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD for years to come.

Ben XVI:

- A Psalm that is totally imbued with trust, in which the Psalmist expresses his serene certainty that he is guided and protected, safe from every danger, because the Lord is his Shepherd.
- “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want”: the beautiful prayer begins with these words, evoking the nomadic environment of sheep-farming and the experience of familiarity between the shepherd and the sheep that make up his little flock. The image calls to mind an atmosphere of trust, intimacy and tenderness: the shepherd knows each one of his sheep and calls them by name; and they follow him because they recognize him and trust in him (cf. Jn 10:2-4).
- He tends them, looks after them as precious possessions, ready to defend them, to guarantee their well-being and enable them to live a peaceful life. They can lack nothing as long as the shepherd is with them.
- The vision that unfolds before our eyes is that of green pastures and springs of clear water, oases of peace to which the shepherd leads his flock, symbols of the places of life towards which the Lord leads the Psalmist, who feels like the sheep lying on the grass beside a stream, resting rather than in a state of tension or alarm, peaceful and trusting, because it is a safe place, the water is fresh and the shepherd is watching over them.
- And let us not forget here that the scene elicited by the Psalm is set in a land that is largely desert, on which the scorching sun beats down, where the Middle-Eastern semi-nomad shepherd lives with his flock in the parched steppes that surround the villages. Nevertheless the shepherd knows where to find grass and fresh water, essential to life, he can lead the way to oases in which the soul is “restored” and where it is possible to recover strength and new energy to start out afresh on the journey.
- God guides him to “green pastures” and “still waters”, where everything is superabundant, everything is given in plenty. If the Lord is the Shepherd, even in the desert, a desolate place of death, the certainty of a radical presence of life is not absent, so that he is able to say “I shall not want”. Indeed, the shepherd has

at heart the good of his flock, he adapts his own pace and needs to those of his sheep, he walks and lives with them, leading them on paths “of righteousness”, that is, suitable for them, paying attention to their needs and not to his own. The safety of his sheep is a priority for him and he complies with this in leading his flock.

- Those who walk with the Lord even in the dark valleys of suffering, doubt and all the human problems, feel safe. You are with me: this is our certainty, this is what supports us. The darkness of the night frightens us with its shifting shadows, with the difficulty of distinguishing dangers, with its silence taut with strange sounds. If the flock moves after sunset when visibility fades, it is normal for the sheep to be restless, there is the risk of stumbling or even of straying and getting lost, and there is also the fear of possible assailants lurking in the darkness.
- To speak of the “dark” valley, the Psalmist uses a Hebrew phrase that calls to mind the shadows of death, which is why the valley to be passed through is a place of anguish, terrible threats, the danger of death. Yet the person praying walks on in safety undaunted since he knows that the Lord is with him. “You are with me” is a proclamation of steadfast faith and sums up the radical experience of faith; God’s closeness transforms the reality, the dark valley loses all danger, it is emptied of every threat. Now the flock can walk in tranquillity, accompanied by the familiar rhythmical beat of the staff on the ground, marking the shepherd’s reassuring presence.
- The Lord is now presented as the One who welcomes the person praying with signs of generous hospitality, full of attention. The divine host lays the food on the “table”, a term which in Hebrew means, in its primitive sense, the animal skin that was spread out on the ground and on which the food for the common meal was set out. It is a gesture of sharing, not only of food but also of life in an offering of communion and friendship that create bonds and express solidarity. Then there is the munificent gift of scented oil poured on the head, which with its fragrance brings relief from the scorching of the desert sun, refreshes and calms the skin and gladdens the spirit.
- Lastly, the cup overflowing with its exquisite wine, shared with superabundant generosity, adds a note of festivity. Food, oil and wine are gifts that bring life and give joy, because they go beyond what is strictly necessary and express the free giving and abundance of love.
- The Psalmist becomes the object of much attention for which reason he sees himself as a wayfarer who finds shelter in a hospitable tent, whereas his enemies have to stop and watch, unable to intervene, since the one whom they considered their prey has been led to safety and has become a sacred guest who cannot be touched. And the Psalmist is us, if we truly are believers in communion with Christ. When God opens his tent to us to receive us, nothing can harm us.
- Then after the Babylonian Exile, as it were in a new Exodus (cf. Is 40:3-5, 9-11; 43:16-21), Israel was brought back to its homeland like a lost sheep found and

led by God to luxuriant pastures and resting places (cf. Ezek 34:11-16, 23-31). However, it is in the Lord Jesus that all the evocative power of our Psalm reaches completeness, finds the fullness of its meaning: Jesus is the “Good Shepherd” who goes in search of lost sheep, who knows his sheep and lays down his life for them (cf. Mt 18:12-14; Lk 15:4-7; Jn 10:2-4, 11-18). He is the way, the right path that leads us to life (cf. Jn 14:6), the light that illuminates the dark valley and overcomes all our fears (cf. Jn 1:9; 8:12; 9:5; 12:46).

- He is the generous host who welcomes us and rescues us from our enemies, preparing for us the table of his body and his blood (cf. Mt 26:26-29; Mk 14:22-25); Lk 22:19-20) and the definitive table of the messianic banquet in Heaven (cf. Lk 14:15ff; Rev 3:20; 19:9). He is the Royal Shepherd, king in docility and in forgiveness, enthroned on the glorious wood of the cross (cf. Jn 3:13-15; 12:32; 17:4-5).
- Psalm 23 invites us to renew our trust in God, abandoning ourselves totally in his hands.

2nd Reading - Ephesians 2:13-18 - In Christ Jesus you who once were far off have become near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, he who made both one and broke down the dividing wall of enmity, through his flesh, abolishing the law with its commandments and legal claims, that he might create in himself one new person in place of the two, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile both with God, in one body, through the cross, putting that enmity to death by it. He came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near, for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

SCB:

- Paul’s letter describes the union of Jew and Gentile.
- Through His death on the cross Christ has abolished the division of mankind into Jews and Gentiles. The Gentiles, who had been excluded from the old covenant, and the accompanying blessings, are now included in the New Covenant on an equal basis with the Jews. A covenant which has been ritually accomplished with the blood of Christ. Jesus’ obedience to God’s wishes, to the point of a sacrificial death, has atoned for the disobedience of Adam, and also for the sin of the golden calf. (see also Colossians 1:20-22). Jesus is the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6; Micah 5:4).
- Because they are now a holy nation, a nation of priests, the requirements of the Levitical law are no longer applicable. They are no longer God’s servants/slaves but his children and the need for the old law has been fulfilled (Matthew 5:17). The old law had precepts of a moral, legal, and liturgical type. The moral precepts still hold but with greater weight and meaning. The legal and liturgical precepts applied to slaves/servants, not to free people of God. The law of the Old Testament (Covenant), although from God and therefore good and holy, created an unbridgeable gap between God and man because man, by himself,

could not keep the Law (Acts 15:7-11). Christ, through grace, has created a new man who can keep the very essence of the law -- obedience (which is the living out of love).

- Jesus is the new man because he is the new Adam – the one who stands for both Jew and Gentile. We, the Church, are the body of Christ.
- The Greek does not have to become a Jew. Rather both enter into a new condition. His aim is not to bring Greek believers into being as different kinds of Jews but rather to create both anew. Rightly he uses the term ‘create’ rather than ‘change’ to point out the great effect of what God has done. Even though the creation is invisible it is no less a creation of its Creator.
- One Church, one faith, one body of Christ.
- By becoming the one perfect sacrifice which inaugurates the New Covenant.
- Prior to Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross, man was excluded from the Father’s house; he lived more like a slave than a son (Galatians 4:1-5); he had no inheritance. Now we have the spirit of sonship and with it the right of inheritance (Romans 8:15-17).
- Christians are bound together by the Holy Spirit who acts in them.
- The Holy Spirit is always present and continually active in the Church, the mystical body of Christ.
- Through Jesus’ humanity, the source of the Spirit, men can approach God the Father.

Gospel - Mark 6:30-34

The apostles gathered together with Jesus and reported all they had done and taught. He said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while." People were coming and going in great numbers, and they had no opportunity even to eat. So they went off in the boat by themselves to a deserted place. People saw them leaving and many came to know about it. They hastened there on foot from all the towns and arrived at the place before them.

When he disembarked and saw the vast crowd, his heart was moved with pity for them, for they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.

SCB:

- This is the only place in the Gospel of Mark where the twelve are called “apostles” – one who is sent. They are usually called disciples - students. In the verse immediately preceding our reading today, St. Mark refers to John the Baptist’s disciples and thus must refer to the twelve as apostles for reasons of clarity.
- The intensity of Jesus’ public ministry. But Jesus also teaches here to have the common sense not to go to extremes with which we cannot physically cope.

- St Bede - "The Lord makes his disciples rest, to show those in charge that people who work or preach cannot do so without breaks."
- The crowd, on foot, beat Jesus and His disciples in their boat. The crowd was not expected. Because they were to travel without food, this sets the stage for the multiplication of the loaves which we will hear next week.
- Jesus is not annoyed with the crowd, he shows compassion. He recognizes their spiritual need and changes His plans and begins to preach.
- This depicts Jesus as the Good Shepherd. Jesus takes care of the people.

SH:

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RC:

- Jesus invites his disciples to separate themselves from the crowd and their work and to go away with him to a "lonely place."
- He taught them to do what he did: to balance action and contemplation, to go from contact with people to secret and regenerating dialogue with oneself and with God.
- The theme is of great importance and timeliness. The rhythm of life has acquired a speed that surpasses our capacity to adapt.
- Jesus, in the Gospel, never gives the impression of being agitated by hurry. Sometimes he even wastes time: All look for him and he does not let himself be found, absorbed as he is in prayer. Sometimes, as in our Gospel passage, he even invites his disciples to lose time with him: "Come away by yourselves to a lonely place, and rest a while." He often recommends that one not be harassed. Our bodies benefit so much from such "respites."
- Among these "pauses" are precisely the summer vacations which we are living. For the majority of people, they are the only occasion to rest a while, to converse in a relaxed manner with their own spouse, to play with the children, to read a good book or to contemplate nature in silence; in short, to relax.
- It must be said that Jesus' vacation with the apostles was of brief duration, because the people, seeing him going away, went ahead of him on foot to the place of disembarkation. But Jesus does not get irritated with the people who give him no peace, but is "moved," seeing them abandoned to themselves, as sheep without a shepherd," and he begins to "teach them many things."