

## Bible Study

### Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, cycle B

**Opening Prayer:** (Sign of the Cross) “Lord our God, you watch over all you have made and you hear the cry of each one who calls out to you. You know the hunger in our souls, our longing to know you better and to love you more fully. Speak to our souls now and allow us to taste once again the depth of your goodness. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.”

#### **Focusing Questions**

1. Where did you experience God’s shepherding hand during this last week?
2. Did you also shepherd anyone at some time during this week? What was that like?

#### **Commentary before the First Reading: Jeremiah 23:1-6**

Kings in the Hebrew culture were chosen by God and charged with shepherding the people with the same concern that God had for them. Through Jeremiah, God explained that the blatant violations of God’s laws by the people, and especially by their kings (2 Chronicles 36), were the cause of their exile in Babylonia. Although we Christians see in these words a prophecy of Jesus the Messiah, Jeremiah had a more immediate vision when he spoke the words: a true shepherd king would be raised up, who would lead the people out of misery and back to glory. There is an interesting play on words at the end of the reading: this new leader, “the Lord our justice,” was being contrasted with the weak puppet king Zedekiah, whose Hebrew name means “the Lord is justice.”

Read the First Reading aloud.

1. How have the people’s spiritual and political leaders failed, according to the prophet?
2. What direct actions will God Himself take in order to shepherd his people himself?
3. If “shoot” refers here to new growth on a plant, what is a “righteous shoot to David”?
4. Identify 3 ways in which the new king will be different from Zedekiah and many of his predecessors?
5. From our vantage point, how did Jesus really fulfill the words of this prophecy?

#### **Commentary before the Second Reading: Ephesians 2:13-18**

From his prison cell in Rome, Saint Paul wrote this letter to the churches in Asia Minor (today’s Turkey and parts of several surrounding countries). There was much division in the still young Church between Jewish believers who had followed the 600+ laws of the Mosaic tradition and the non-Jewish believers who were unfamiliar with that Law. The Apostles repeatedly taught that the only commandment now was that of Jesus: to love God with all our hearts and to love our neighbors as ourselves. Paul describes in this reading his vision of the Church as Jews and Gentiles together, redeemed by Christ and worshipping God as one in the Holy Spirit.

Read the Second Reading aloud.

1. What do you think Saint Paul means by “far off” and “have become near” in the first verse?
2. Which two groups had been separate and had now become “both one”?
3. What is the “one new person,” the “body” to which Saint Paul refers in verse 15?
4. Which common elements in the Church bring unity to the variety of people who have joined themselves to Christ, even as they acknowledge and celebrate their cultural differences?
5. What evidence of today’s “shepherd” theme do you see in this reading?

#### **Commentary before the Gospel Reading: Mark 6:30-34**

Last week we heard the section immediately preceding this: Jesus sent the Twelve, two-by-two, on mission. Now we hear of their return and Jesus’ invitation that they come away and rest for a while. However, the people followed them to the secluded location because they were so hungry to hear more of his preaching, which was so different from what they were accustomed to hearing and which made so much sense to the ordinary people. This story leads in to the feeding of the 5000, the Gospel reading for next Sunday.

Read the Gospel Reading out loud.

1. Name the underlying emotions in verse 30, then verse 31, verse 32, and verse 34?
2. Look at last week’s Gospel and identify what the apostles had just done that merited their wanting to share their recent experiences.

3. In what ways does Jesus shepherd both the Apostles and the hungry crowds?
4. The Scribes, who made copies of the Torah and were able to read and explain to the people the Hebrew Scriptures (our “Old Testament”), and Pharisees who were the official teachers at that time, were the official religious leaders at Jesus’ time. Where in this Gospel reading do you see hints that they were often not good shepherds?
5. Is it possible that they failed even while thinking they were doing the right things? Explain.

### **Applying the Readings to our Daily Lives**

1. Is the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd meaningful to you? In what way?
2. In what way are all of us called to be shepherds for God’s people?
3. For 21<sup>st</sup> century people, is there another image – other than that of a shepherd – which might be more meaningful to us?
4. Where do divisions or barriers remain between the followers of Jesus Christ which still need reconciliation and healing? Is there anything that you personally can do about that?
5. How might employers balance justice and compassion towards employees with justice toward the customers?
6. The Apostles hungered for rest and a chance to “debrief” what they had just experienced; the people hungered to hear God’s Word. For what do you hunger?
7. Is there an area of your life lacks balance? What do you do to balance your personal needs with the needs of your family and friends?

### **Closing Prayer**

“Almighty God, let the gift of your life continue to grow in us, drawing us from death to life, from confusion to faith, from despair to hope, and from self-centeredness to love. Keep us alive in Christ Jesus, watchful in prayer, and true to his teaching until your glory is revealed in us. Grant this through that same Christ our Lord. Amen.”  
(Sign of the Cross)