

16th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – YEAR B

(Jeremiah 23.1-6; Ephesians 2.13-18; Mark 6.30-34)

Excerpt from Pope Francis - Angelus - 22 July 2018

Excerpt from Pope Benedict - Angelus - 22 July 2012

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Brothers and sisters, the Word of God this Sunday reminds us that God is the Shepherd of humanity. This means that God wants life for us, he wants to guide us to good pastures where we can be nourished and rest. He does not want us to be lost and to perish, but to reach the destination of our journey which is the fullness of life itself. This is what every father and mother desires for their children: their good, their happiness and their fulfilment.

In today's Gospel Jesus presents himself as the Shepherd of the lost sheep of the House of Israel. He beholds the people, so to speak, with a "pastoral" gaze. For example, this Sunday's Gospel says: as he disembarked, "he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things" (Mk 6:34).

Now, there is a word in the text which is different in other Bibles. It is a word that I don't like: "his heart was moved with pity for them". Jesus did not have pity for the great crowd in the sense of feeling sorrow or shame. Jesus had compassion, meaning suffered with the crowd.

Jesus embodies God the Shepherd with his manner of preaching and his works, caring for the sick and sinners, for those who are "lost" (cf. Lk 19:10), in order to bring them back to safety through the Father's mercy. The Evil One always seeks to spoil God's work, sowing division in the human heart, between body and soul, between the individual and God, in interpersonal, social and international relations, as well as between human beings and creation. The Evil One sows discord; God creates peace. Indeed, as Saint Paul says, Christ "is our peace, in his flesh he has made both Jews and Gentiles into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us (Eph 2:14).

We have heard that after their first mission, the Apostles returned, which was undoubtedly thrilling but also tiring, so they needed to rest. And understanding this well, Jesus wished to give them some relief. But Jesus' intention could not be fulfilled because the crowd, as guessing the location of the place where he would take the disciples, ran there and got there ahead of them. The same can happen today. At times we are not able to complete our projects because something urgent and unexpected occurs, disrupting our plans and this requires flexibility and being available to the needs of others.

In these situations, we are called to imitate what Jesus did. The Evangelist offers us a *flash* of three verbs: *to see, to have compassion, to teach*.

We can call them the Shepherd's verbs. The *gaze* of Jesus is not a neutral one — or cold and detached, because Jesus always looks with the eyes of the heart. And his heart is so tender and filled with *compassion*, that he is able to understand even the most hidden needs of people. His compassion does not simply suggest an emotional response toward people in situations of distress. It is much more. It is God's attitude and predisposition toward humankind and its history. Jesus appears as the fulfillment of God's concern and care for his people.

Because Jesus was moved when he saw all those people in need of guidance and help, we could expect him to perform some miracles. Instead, he began *teaching* them many things. This is the first bread that the Messiah offers to the starving and lost crowd; the bread of the Word. We all need the Word of truth to guide and illuminate our way. Without the truth which is Christ himself, it is not possible to find the right direction in life. When we distance ourselves from Jesus and his love, we become lost and life is transformed into disappointment and dissatisfaction. With Jesus by our side, we can proceed with confidence and overcome all trials, advancing in love toward God and neighbour. Jesus gave himself for others, becoming an example of love and service for each of us.

And through his gift, in order to carry out this work of radical reconciliation Jesus the Good Shepherd had to become a Lamb, “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn 1:29).

Brothers and sisters, may Mary, Most Holy, help us to bear the problems, suffering and difficulties of our neighbours with an attitude of sharing and service.