

## **16<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME (Cycle B)**

**July 18-19, 2009 -- Deacon Bill Nourse, Ed.D.**

I often say that I have two remaining goals in life.

Lately I've been thinking that I might not be able to accomplish either one of those goals, and that I might as well just get used to it and get over myself.

One of them is not to die in Memphis.

But unless I win the Powerball, I'm probably going to be here a while. This is probably my last stop.

The other one is never to be "in charge" of anything ever again.

But if I'm going to be true to my calling, as a deacon and as a Christian, I just might have to be "in charge" once in a while. I have a duty to use whatever gifts I have in the service of the Church, and in the service of others. As much as I cringe at the thought, sometimes that means accepting a leadership role, whether I want it or not. There's a Gospel verse – it's not the Gospel we heard today, but Luke's Gospel says,

"Much will be required of the person entrusted with much, and still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more." (Luke 12:48)

Sometimes people are eager to seek positions of leadership. Sometimes it's about duty and responsibility, about doing what we ought to do, and that's a good thing. But sometimes it's about power and control. Henry Kissinger once said, "Power is the ultimate aphrodisiac." That doesn't sound like "servant leadership" to me.

If a leader is simply incompetent, well, that's one thing. Ignorance can be remedied, stupidity is forever. But neither one is what Jeremiah is talking about today.

Sometimes leaders make a deliberate decision to seek power for its own sake, to betray their calling, to subvert the principles they're supposed to uphold, to grasp for power rather than service. Simple failure is one thing. We all experience that, one way or another. Betrayal is another thing entirely.

The Prophet Jeremiah comes down hard on people like that – shepherds who mislead their flock. “Woe to the shepherds who mislead and scatter the flock of my pasture, says the LORD. 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.”

Church leaders bear a great responsibility. “Much will be required of the person entrusted with much, and still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more.” There is a price to be paid for betraying that responsibility.

It all reminded me of something that St. Athanasius supposedly said at the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. It was a time of great turmoil in the Church. The Arian heresy was very strong, and a lot of Church leaders had aligned themselves with it. Athanasius said,

“The floor of hell is paved with the skulls of priests.”

He was talking about the damage that had been done to the Church at the time by Church leaders who had been ensnared by false teachings. They were misleading the very people who had been entrusted to them to shepherd and protect.

I guess it's happened in everyone's time – in Jeremiah's time, in Athanasius's time, and certainly in our own time.

In Jeremiah's time, God promised to gather the scattered flock into one fold. That promise was fulfilled in Christ. In the fourth century, Athanasius struggled to help the Church keep that promise. Many others have done the same since then. In our own time, we are called to bring the love and care of Christ to the world.

It takes courage to lead, but it also takes a shepherd's heart. In today's Gospel, we see Jesus trying to take a little time out to rest. But He was a charismatic guy. People flocked to Him, the crowds followed, hungry for leadership, making demands on Him, seeking to submit themselves to His authority.

Most of us probably would have seen them as an intrusion and tried to slip out the back door – but Jesus sees them as “sheep without a shepherd.” So He did what He was called to do, and “began to teach them at great length.”

Unfortunately Jesus is not here today in such a way that He can teach us directly. Today, He extends His care to his people principally through the ordained ministry of priests – and deacons.

We all have our human weaknesses. In spite of them, we have a duty to do our best. Maybe sometimes we even use our weaknesses to inspire others – I've often thought that some of us were put on this earth to serve as examples not to be emulated.

Well, so what? What can you do?

The first thing is to pray for your priests and deacons. Remember that we are called to be both sheep and shepherd. All of you know that the “sheep” part is challenging and difficult enough, but

to be the kind of shepherd God has promised his people is even more daunting – especially when we try to emulate the model of the “Good Shepherd.” That’s an impossible task. Doing the things a deacon **does** isn’t all that hard – but “being” a deacon can be a real challenge. You need to encourage us. Demand more of us.

And remember that you are a holy people. Be holy examples for your priests and deacons. Be someone we can emulate. Seek to be shepherds. The priests and deacons the Church needs tomorrow will come from the Christian families of today. Serve as examples for them to emulate. Let them see servant leadership played out in your home. Take responsibility for new vocations to the priesthood.

We heard it in our reading from Jeremiah – God has promised us that he will give his Church good shepherds. His promises don’t have expiration dates. But we do have a duty to help His promises reach fulfillment.

## READINGS

### Reading 1

Jer 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."

### Responsorial Psalm

Ps 23:1-3, 3-4, 5, 6

R. (1) The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.  
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.  
R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.  
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.  
R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.  
You spread the table before me  
in the sight of my foes;  
you anoint my head with oil;  
my cup overflows.  
R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.  
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.  
R. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

### Reading II

Eph 2:13-18

Brothers and sisters:  
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.

**Gospel**

Mk 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.