

Fr James' homily for the 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time 2021



First Reading: Prophecy of Jeremiah 23:1-6
Second Reading: Letter of the Ephesians 2:13-18
Gospel: Mark 6: 30-34

Jeremiah the prophet is writing at a time of great tension when everything is falling apart for Israel and the whole nation is about to go into exile. When Jeremiah rants at the shepherds of Israel he is talking about the line of kings. That might seem like a curious historical point, but it is much more relevant, for the prophet is talking about the whole relationship between God and his people.

There came a point where the people said “we want a king”. Forgetting that God is supposed to be the king of Israel, in a very practical way at a moment of crisis they said we want a king, to be LIKE THE OTHER NATIONS. And that's the point. They were supposed to be unlike the other nations. They were supposed to live as a sign of contradiction to the world, a beacon of possibility. To live according to God's ways, choosing his path, not their own. To trust in God before relying on their own resources.

What does God propose? That he himself will become the shepherd and that, mysteriously, he will also raise up a new king from the line of David. Which is it? Well, of course, this is the Gospel we proclaim, that God and man are united in Jesus - God come to shepherd his people in person. This wonderful mystery is so beautifully expressed in the Letter to the Ephesians today: through him all peoples can come to know god the Father.

Israel is called to be a beacon, leading the peoples to God. Sounds familiar? This is true too of the Church, of us, the new Israel. We are called to live in the same way, as a beacon, critical of the selfish and destructive influences around us. Pain and crisis come into the life of faith when we are seduced or confused by other things.

From all that we can look at the short, beautiful Gospel scene .. The disciples come back from the journey they have been on...a new journey, a new way, proclaiming the kingdom...as we pray "Thy kingdom come", a new radical way in which all other kingdoms have to go.

Jesus sees a vast crowd, Israel they represent, and they are scattered. His heart is moved to pity, for he is the one Jeremiah predicted, God himself shepherding his people. He doesn't give them what kings provide: economic stability, military glory..indeed that's not what Jeremiah meant. he meant that in Him God's values

would become the governing principles. So the Gospel says: Jesus began to teach them many things - a vision of a new life.

This is a basic point of the faith: discern the things of the world and the way of the world. Make a spiritual space to be with Jesus, this is really the Kingdom of God we pray to come at this Mass and every day. We are all always looking for direction, and we look at all sorts of possible ways to follow. The Gospel, the good news, is that the shepherd has come. He is here. Jesus, in whom we can find all purpose and hope. Each day must be marked in some way by “coming away” to “rest” in him.

Amen.

Fr James and Fr Tom wish you a blessed Sunday. Keep safe and well, and never hesitate to pick up the telephone and be in touch.