

Missionary Commentary

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
July 21, 2024

Sunday Readings

Jeremiah 23:1-6
Psalm 23:1-6
Ephesians 2:13-18
Mark 6:30-34

[USCCB Link to the Readings](#)

The Plans of a Shepherd

A fellow missionary and priest and I lived together in a small, adobe house on the outskirts of the capital city of Chile, hoping to start accompanying the beginnings of a new Catholic community in a neighborhood without any nearby church or chapel.

We adopted a Chilean model of evangelization that required, as a first step, the establishment of a “friendly presence” in the area around us. This meant, we soon found, acting as Chileans act, and allowing people to visit, and be served a cup of tea with some cookies, whenever they decided to come by and knock on the gate, and cultivating the personal freedom to set aside our own plans and schedule.

Unexpected visitors can be a strain on our patience and flexibility, especially when they interrupt our plans, but mission among peoples who have their own shared customs and rules about hospitality can challenge us to reevaluate our own priorities, especially when we realize that Jesus himself seems to put people before schedules. In today’s Gospel reading, Jesus puts aside his own desire to debrief his disciples, fresh from their own mission, and respond like a shepherd to a new situation, as described by Saint Mark.

There is a hunger for God’s presence, wisdom and spiritual nourishment in the mass of arriving visitors that powerfully moves Jesus, as he contemplates the large crowd of people anxiously seeking the protection and enlightenment of God that the Messiah offers. He acts on this compassion immediately, and presumably postpones the conversation and teachings he wants to deliver to his own disciples until later.

Analysis and conversations that reflect upon our lives and experiences is important, as members of a Church that exists for mission. But we’ll be putting the cart before the horse—or, perhaps more aptly, the corral before the sheep—if we fail to learn to attend to the person before us as our teacher, and imbibe the lesson of working according to God’s schedule.

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Notes on the Sunday Readings

First Reading

Jeremiah 23:1-6 – On the eve of Judah's collapse and exile to Babylon (in 597 B.C.E.), the prophet Jeremiah wrote down several oracles he received from the Lord God, collected here, foreseeing the restoration of the blessings of the covenant between God and his People, under a descendent of David, a shepherd who will bring together both the northern (Israel) and southern kingdoms.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 23:1-6 – This song of trust recognizes the Lord as a royal shepherd and host of a royal banquet, bringing hope in a secure future to the Chosen People suffering exile from their land, and scattered abroad.

Second Reading

Ephesians 2:13-18 – Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross has brought both Jewish and Gentile people together, uniting them into one People with equal access to the Father, Paul writes from his prison.

Gospel

Mark 6:30-34 – Jesus invites his disciples to come away to a quiet place, evoking the image of Psalm 23 by acting as a shepherd who brings his sheep to "rest for a while" by running waters. From the depths of his heart, Jesus is moved to respond to the hunger of the large, unexpected crowd for wisdom and spiritual food in this desolate place. He acts right away, and begins to teach them "many things".

*Notes and commentary by Fr. Bob Mosher,
a member of the [Missionary Society of Saint Columban](#)*

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May God bless you in all the ways you Go Forth...



As the Father has sent me, so I send you.
JOHN 20:21

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