

## 16<sup>TH</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B

*The connection between today's first reading and the gospel is very clear. This first reading is about bad shepherds. The gospel narrative shows us good shepherds.<sup>2</sup> Jeremiah has just finished writing commentaries on a number of kings in chronological order. We would expect this one to be about Zedekiah, but instead, it is about a future Messiah King.<sup>3</sup>*

### Jeremiah 23:1-6

**1**Woe to the shepherds who mislead and scatter the flock of my pasture, says the Lord. These shepherds who are condemned en masse are the kings of the Israelite nation. Yahweh is already at work to bring upon them his judgment. Indeed, all the last kings of Judah met tragic ends.<sup>3</sup>

**2**Therefore, thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, against the shepherds who shepherd my people: Jeremiah's warning was that all leaders would be held responsible for those entrusted to their care.<sup>10</sup> WE TOO ARE RESPONSIBLE TO GOD FOR THOSE IN OUR CARE! You have scattered my sheep and driven them away. You have not cared for them, but I will take care. The double use of the word "cared" and "care" contrasts notions of nurturing and threat.<sup>12</sup> to punish your evil deeds.

**3**I myself will gather the remnant of my flock. Yahweh promises to bring back the remnant of his sheep, which implies not all of them, just some small part of them.<sup>1</sup> from all the lands to which I have driven them and bring them back to their meadow; there they shall increase and multiply. The new day has several aspects: 1. Yahweh himself will bring it about directly. 2. Exiles shall be restored to their own land and homes. 3. A new and better line of rulers will govern the land. 4. There will be peace and freedom from fear. 5. There will be great prosperity.<sup>1</sup>

**4**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. JP II referred to this verse to stress that the Church will always have pastors to guide it. Here God promises his people that he will never leave them without shepherds to gather them together and guide them.<sup>6</sup>

**5**Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up a righteous shoot. We see this as Jesus Christ, the Messiah.<sup>6</sup> The "righteous shoot" becomes a classic term, perhaps the most common Old Testament reference for the Messiah.<sup>5</sup> to David, as king he shall reign and govern wisely, he shall do what is just and right in the land. This section foresees a remnant that will learn from the punishment and return wholeheartedly to the Lord. This king will have three qualities: he shall rule as a king should, he shall be wise, and he shall fulfill the two covenant requirements of justice and righteousness.<sup>1</sup>

**6**In his days Judah shall be saved, Israel shall dwell in security. This foresees the restoration of the united kingdom of North and South.<sup>1</sup> This is the name they give him: "The Lord our justice." The king to come will be a true son of David, upright like David, obedient to Yahweh as victor, and legitimate in all senses of the word. He will be the opposite of Zedekiah who was technically only a regent. He shall be wise, unlike Zedekiah; he shall do justice and righteousness unlike Zedekiah; and he shall rely on Yahweh's righteousness and victory and not his own, unlike Zedekiah.<sup>1</sup> "The Lord our justice" is a pun on the name of Judah's last king, Zedekiah, which means, "My justice is the Lord." The reversal of terms in the names suggests the replacement of an incompetent king with one who will do God's will.<sup>3</sup> As Peter Kreeft said in his book *The God Who Loves You*, "Prophets are like fingers, not like faces. We are not meant to look at them but to the reality to which they point."<sup>16</sup>

## Ephesians 2:13-18

*Paul writes this as a Jew preaching to the Gentiles and as a Christian preaching to his fellow Jews. Jews and Gentiles (whether Christians or not) of Paul's time coexisted uneasily.<sup>2</sup>*

### Brothers and sisters:

**13**In Christ Jesus you who once were far off Gentiles who knew little or nothing about God<sup>10</sup> have become near Jews were near to God because they already knew him through scripture and worship. A convert to Judaism is referred to as someone who has “come near.”<sup>10</sup> **by the blood of Christ.**

**14**For he (Jesus) is our peace, The peace of Christ is not worldly tranquility but a spiritual peace rooted in our reconciliation with the Father.<sup>7</sup> **he who made both** (Jews and Gentiles) **one and broke down the dividing wall of enmity,** Jews were not only circumcised, they were also separated to protect them from contamination: they couldn't eat with a Gentile nor enter his home. There was no social interaction.<sup>3</sup> Another “dividing wall of enmity” was the wall that separated the Court of the Gentiles from the rest of the Temple which consisted of a series of courts, each one a little higher than the one that went before, with the Temple itself in the inmost of the courts. First there was the Court of the Gentiles; then the Court of the Women; then the Court of the Israelites; then the Court of the Priests; and then the Holy Place itself. Only into the first of them could a Gentile come. Between it and the Court of the Women there was a wall, or rather a kind of screen of marble, beautifully wrought, and let into it at intervals there were tablets which announced that if a Gentile proceeded any farther he was liable to instant death. This wall effectively shut the Gentile out from the presence of God.<sup>11</sup>

**15**through his flesh, abolishing the law with its commandments and legal claims, The law had been worked out into thousands and thousands of rules and regulations and commandments and decrees. Hands had to be washed in a certain way; dishes had to be cleaned in a certain way; there was page after page about what could be done and what could not be done on the Sabbath day. The only people who attempted to really and fully keep the Jewish law were the Pharisees and there were only some six thousand of them at the time of Christ. Jesus essentially ended legalism as the principle of religion.<sup>11</sup> **that he might create in himself one new person** Jesus stands for both the Jews and the Gentiles because he is the new Adam.<sup>9</sup> **in place of the two, thus establishing peace,** John Chrysostom said that this was as if one should melt down a statue of silver and a statue of lead, and the two should come out gold.<sup>11</sup>

**16**and might reconcile both with God, in one body, through the cross, The irony is striking: the cross which is a symbol of hostility and death is now the symbol of reconciliation and the end of enmity and conflict. **putting that enmity to death by it.** This is the heart of the reading: By shedding his blood for us, Christ made all people into one new people.<sup>12</sup>

**17**He came and preached peace This word, “peace,” is so rich in meaning that we have no single word for it in English. It means communion with God. It is a state of interior calm and of harmonious relations with the Christian community. An essential component of peace is righteousness and where there is no righteousness there is no genuine peace. True peace is separated from false peace when disaster comes. Peace in the New Testament becomes VERY NEARLY SYNONYMOUS WITH SALVATION.<sup>8</sup> **to you who were far off and peace to those who were near,** “Far off” and “near” refers to the spiritual distance from God. Paul is paraphrasing Isaiah where peace is proclaimed both to Israel, the people nearest the Lord, and to the Gentiles, the

people of distant lands who once lived far off from God.<sup>7</sup> The prayer in the mass following the last petition of the Our Father is: “Deliver us, Lord, from every evil, and grant us peace in our day.”  
18for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. The way to the Father passes through Christ. In Oriental courts there was an official whose job was to introduce a person into the king’s presence. Christ became such a person for he took two separated children, Jews and Gentiles, united them as brothers, and brought them into the intimacy of God’s family.<sup>3</sup> Because of Jesus the door is always open to the presence of God for Jew and for Gentile alike.

### Mark 6:30-34

*In last Sunday’s gospel, Jesus sent the Twelve out in pairs to preach. In this passage the Twelve return and now Mark calls them “apostles” which is not so much a title as a function for it means “one who is sent.”<sup>5</sup>*

30The apostles gathered together with Jesus and reported all they had done and taught. In the other Gospels we are told that they proclaimed repentance and the coming of God’s kingdom.<sup>3</sup>

31He said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.” The compassionate shepherd knows they need a rest after their labors and invites them to a secluded retreat.<sup>2</sup> People were coming and going in great numbers, and they had no opportunity even to eat.  
32So they went off in the boat by themselves to a deserted place.

33People 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. According to Barclay, at this particular place it was four miles across the lake by boat and ten miles round the top of the lake on foot. On a windless day, or with a contrary wind, a boat might take some time to make the passage, and an energetic person could walk round the top of the lake and be there before the boat arrived. This what appears to have happened.<sup>15</sup>

34When he disembarked and saw the vast crowd, his heart was moved with pity for them, for they were like sheep without a shepherd; This was a familiar simile from the Old Testament. It generally depicts Israel’s need for spiritual leadership. A sheep without a shepherd cannot find the way, cannot find its pasture and its food and has no defense against the dangers which threaten it.<sup>15</sup> Ultimately God himself promised to shepherd his sheep through the Messiah.<sup>14</sup> and he began to teach them many things. Jesus is moved by hunger and sorrow, but what moves him most is ignorance. Note his attitude of availability.<sup>13</sup> Jesus’ generous response as Good Shepherd is to teach them more and more.<sup>2</sup> It is after this teaching in this deserted place that the feeding of the five thousand takes place. (Mark 6:35-44)

*Some of the material for this commentary has been taken from: (1) “Jeremiah 1-25” by Lawrence Boadt, C.S.P., (2) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 2005” by Aelred R. Rosser, (3) “The Jerome Biblical Commentary,” (4) “The Catechism of the Catholic Church,” (5) “The Liturgical Press Old Testament Reading Guide: The Books of Jeremiah and Baruch” by Carroll Stuhlmueller, C.P., (6) “The Navarre Bible: Major Prophets,” (7) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Letters of St. Paul to the Galatians And Ephesians” With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (8) “Dictionary of the Bible” by John L. McKenzie, S.J., (9) “The Navarre Bible: Captivity Epistles,” (10) “The Bread of Life Catholic Bible Study” by Deacon Ken and Marie Finn, (11) “The Letters To The Galatians And Ephesians” by William Barclay, (12) “Workbook For Lectors And Gospel Readers: 1991” by Graziano Marcheschi with Nancy Seitz Marcheschi, (13) “The Navarre Bible: St. Mark” (14) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Mark” With Introduction, Commentary and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (15) “The Gospel of Mark” by William Barclay, and (16) The St. Paul Center For Biblical Theology Online Founded By Dr. Scott Hahn.*

*In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.*