

Beloved in Christ, today's readings contain guidance for our **spiritual leaders or our spiritual shepherds**. Our spiritual shepherds should forget themselves and be concerned at all times about the needs of their flock. In the First Reading, the Prophet Jeremiah presents us with an opposite concern, he warns the shepherds who are misleading and scattering their flocks of woe and punishment. Later, however, Jeremiah foresees an ideal king to come who will be righteous shoot from David's family. He shall govern wisely and do what is just and right in the land (Jer.23:1; 5). In fact, the early Christians saw this vision fulfilled in Jesus Christ.as we see in today's gospel. The Good shepherds are those who really take their jobs seriously, who will make sure that nothing happens to their flock, even if they put their own lives in danger. For example, they will be the ones who will fight the wolves that are attacking the flocks. Jesus calls himself the good shepherd in John Chapter 10. He is willing to die for his flock, his followers.

The apostles returned from their missionary journey **tired but elated** at the extraordinary powers Jesus had conferred on them. Jesus invited them to take some rest in a lonely place (Mk.6:31), but upon arrival, they found a large crowd already waiting for them, anxious to listen to Jesus. The Gospel shows us that Jesus was deeply moved; the word used referring to a strong, deep feeling, it is translated *pity*. Mark says that what upset Jesus was that the people were *like sheep without a shepherd Mk.6:34*). They **were tired and hungry**, and had come from a long way "and indeed they were spiritually very distant from the Jewish people". What moved him was that the people were *like sheep without a shepherd*. The ones who should have been *shepherds*, instead of shepherding and feeding the flock, were, from their own positions of power, furthering their own interests by exploiting the flock. Jesus' response was **to teach** the people; he also gave them food to eat; to conscientize them, to tell them of their own dignity and of the source of their dignity: God's deep love for them. Jesus had to empower them to love one another. Jesus respected people, their own responsibility and their own freedom. He could only try to open their eyes; they had to respond. He wanted them to realize that, as adult sons and daughters of a God who trusted them, they were not powerless, and whatever their political or religious leaders failed to do for them, they should trust.

In today's Second Reading, Paul was reflecting on the, often, bitter struggle going on in his day between Jews and Gentiles. He rejoiced that Jesus had brought about reconciliation between the two. Perhaps he was too optimistic, that Jesus had made reconciliation possible, but people had to make it happen. As St Paul said, even of Jesus, that what made reconciliation possible was the Cross. ***He restored peace through the cross... In his own person he killed the hostility*** (Eph.2:14-15) – he absorbed it, he showed its futility, he modelled another way – but it cost him his life. That sort of teaching is hard to take seriously in a world distorted by sin. Our willingness to handle difference, to handle rivalry, is always a struggle. It's almost as though we need difference and threat, to tell us who we are and to give us a sense of identity, and of belonging. We just have to let ourselves be loved by anyone, but, best of all, by God, and, ultimately, by ourselves - and we become freed from seeing difference as threats.

Finally, dear friends, Jesus, our good shepherd, sacrificed his interest in order to serve the people he loves and cares for. He knows all of us totally. He leads us into the greener pasture and water to revive our drooping spirit. He feels and defends us at all times in prayer, the Word of God and above all, by giving us his body and blood for our spiritual and physical nourishment. Let us do our upper most best to sacrifice our comfort, in order, to help those who are in need. Let us do our best in all our dealings, so that we can be a reflection of Christ for people to see Christ in us and be attracted to us. Let us pray in this Mass for the grace to follow Christ with sincerity of heart so that he will lead us to the restful waters and refresh our soul. Amen!