

## **Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time B/2009**

Modern culture teaches us that the growth and the prosperity of peoples and nations depend, to a large extent, on the quality of leadership provided. Good leadership can empower people and contribute to the development of their nation. Bad leadership can prevent the development of a nation and even contribute to the destruction of a people. This is true not only in politics, but also in religious matters. All the readings of this Sunday invite us to meditate on the value of good leadership that is exercised in accord with God's will and which leads to the enhancement of God's people.

In the first reading, God speaks through the mouth of the prophet Jeremiah by denouncing the shepherds who mislead the people and bring misfortune on Israel by their misconduct. The shepherds in the text represent the kings who succeeded in power over Israel, but were corrupt. Instead of taking care of God's people, they worked for their interests and benefits. Instead of protecting the flock entrusted to them, they led it to destruction. Instead of gathering God's people, they drove them away.

As a consequence, God will revoke them, punish their wrong doings and lead his people himself. He will gather the remnant of his people scattered among the nations; he will bring them back home, where they can prosper and multiply under his care.

In order to promote the new leadership about to be implemented, God promised to appoint another leader and shepherd, righteous and just, who will govern wisely and according to his will. He promised that leader will come out of the house of David and the tribe of Judah.

Was this prophecy of Jeremiah realized? Yes, because from the political point of view, there certainly were other kings who replaced the corrupt ones. However, as we know, when a prophecy is given, most of the times its fulfillment goes beyond the scope of time and space. That is why a quick look at the salvation history shows us that it was in the person and the life of Jesus that this promise of Jeremiah has been completely fulfilled.

It is for that reason that today's Gospel presents Jesus not only as a good shepherd whose heart is moved to pity for the people entrusted to him by the Father, but also as the one who seriously takes care of them. Jesus has fulfilled this mission by sharing it with his apostles. He sent them to continue what he has started and bring the good news of heaven to all the nations throughout the world.

It is Jesus who is our peace, as St Paul says. He is the bond of unity, the one who has finally succeeded in bringing Jews and Gentiles together. He was sent by the Father to gather men and women of every nation and language, race and color, to make them one people in his blood on the cross. It is Jesus who has destroyed all the barriers that separated people in reconciling those who were far and near with God and with one another, in peace.

Today's readings, as I present them, invite us to some points of meditation I would like to share with you. First of all, there is the situation of corruption and misgovernment that Jeremiah denounces. It reminds us of similar situations of injustice and oppression in which many people, especially in the third world, are living. Many leaders of these countries abuse their power and authority. They are

not only corrupt, but care more for themselves than for the people they pretend to serve. By bringing our prayer today before the Lord, let us not forget them.

The words of Jeremiah, however, should not draw our attention only to the sins of others. It is important that we ask ourselves also how we exercise our authority, each one at his level of action and his sector of influence. Do not we, for instance, use authority to further our own self interests, to show people how important we are?

The second point is about the importance of the evaluation of the mission given to us by the Lord. It is striking to see how the apostles come back to give an account of what they have done and taught. To come back to the Lord means to come back to the source that gives us strength to keep working wisely. It means also to recognize that we are not our own boss, but servants who have to do the job according to what the master has recommended. Any servant, who is not able to sincerely assess his action and the result achieved with the Lord, runs the risk of giving free rein to competition and of being concerned only with the statistics.

This is why, the apostles who “gather together” around Jesus and assess with him what they have done, represent the community that keeps constant touch with its Lord. Without continual contact with Christ, those who work for him can easily become just mere functionaries. Can any worker do a job without first learning from a master what he is supposed to do? And after finishing his task, is it not normal that he goes back again to ask him if he has done it in the right way?

The last point I draw from the word of Jesus to the apostles: “*Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while*”. These words are full of consequences, some of which I would like to highlight. In fact, we like active people, in particular priests and deacons and workers, who run after a hundred things and accomplish them without complaining about their hunger or thirst. This way of working, however, ends up as “*activism*”. And let me tell you that *activism kills* the essence of the work of God, because what is accomplished in this sense is done without the heart being there; it is done mostly in order to please people. This is true for the church, as well as for human activities in society.

Jesus says, stop, take a break, and withdraw yourself, to find strength in prayer and meditation. Whenever the Christian community does not stop to consider with the Lord the initiative it takes, it will inevitably follow human logic and judge its planned activity only in terms of success, statistics and conquests. It is important to stop, ponder in silence and pray about what we do. Otherwise we will keep doing it for the Lord, but without the Lord. Let us ask God to pour out upon us his Holy Spirit that we listen to Jesus, the good shepherd of our lives, and follow his example. Let us pray for those who have a particular mission in the church that they may find their strength in the word of Jesus through meditation and the sharing of the Gospel. May God bless you all!

**Jeremiah 23, 1-6; Ephesians 2, 13-18; Mk 6, 30-34**



Homily Date: July 19, 2009

© 2009 – Rev. Felicien I. Mbala, PhD

Contact: [www.mbala.org](http://www.mbala.org)

Document Name: 20090719homily.pdf