

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

July 23, 2006

Jer 23:1-6; Eph 2:13-18; Mk 6:30-34

Homilist: S. Agnes Lanthier, OP

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

One of the lovely memories of the Holy Land that I have kept with me is the sight of a shepherd with his flock on the hills near Bethlehem.

The good Shepherd is such a fitting name and symbol for Jesus. It reminds us of all the qualities that we see in Him: His personal love for each “sheep”, claiming each one of us as his own by “branding” us with His seal at Baptism, and calling us by name; by His watchfulness: providing us with all the food, drink, and healing as needed for healthy spiritual living. As a good shepherd, He uses the rod, the spoken word of God, the weapon of power and defense against danger. As Phillip Keller tells us, “It was the rod of God’s Word that Christ our Good Shepherd used in His own encounter with that serpent, Satan, during His desert temptation.” Psalm 23 p. 98.

Jesus also used the staff, which identifies the shepherd. According to Keller, “The staff is essentially a symbol of the concern and compassion that a shepherd has for His charges.” (Ibid p.98) Jesus showed that concern for His apostles. The Gospel of today relates how when they reported to Him all that they had done and taught, He suggested that they come away to a deserted place, and rest for a while for they had no opportunity to eat. I’m sure that His suggestion was very agreeable to twelve tired and hungry men.

But Jesus, was also a good shepherd to the crowd who had caught up with Him and the apostles in the deserted place, and were hungry to hear Him again. The compassionate Jesus was moved to pity for them, for they were, as the Gospel tells us, “Like sheep without a shepherd, and He began to teach them many things.” (Mark 6: 34)

But what about the hungry and tired apostles?

Jesus seems to have used this opportunity to teach his young and inexperienced preachers that there will be occasions when they must be ready to give of themselves unselfishly even at the cost of time and physical needs. We see this type of scenario repeated during the life and passion of Christ: the incident of the woman at the well when his apostles had gone to buy food for the group. “I have food to eat that you do not know about. My food is to do the will of the one who sent me.” (Jn. 4:32-34) Or again when He disregards His own terrible sufferings during the Way of the Cross and says to the women, “Do not weep for me, weep rather for yourselves and for your children.” (Lk 23:28)

What is our Good Shepherd asking of His shepherds today?

Gratitude? Gratitude for all who have been Good Shepherds to us on our spiritual journey?

Willingness to go the extra mile for the sheep that He has given us in our community and in our ministry?.

Our Good Shepherd went all the way for us to the extent of becoming one of His flock – a lamb
Lamb of God --Jesus