

TRINITY 7/ORD 16 – 2021

Jer 23:1-6

Eph 2:13-18

Mk 6:30-34

Jeremiah was a reluctant prophet. He hated his calling and tried to get out of it, but when God wouldn't let him he persevered. In today's reading Jeremiah accuses the kings of the exiled Jews of acting like destructive shepherds. They didn't care for or protect God's people, nor did they feed their people with God's truth. Jeremiah prophesied that God himself would be their shepherd. He would cause a shoot to spring up from the spiritual desert that David's kingdom had become. This God given king would bear the characteristics of God himself. He would reign justly and righteously. He would restore the greatness of God's people with a new deliverance greater than their deliverance from slavery in Egypt.

Christians see Jesus as that righteous shoot of David's kingdom and he himself saw God's people which includes the Gentiles as well as Jews, as sheep without a shepherd. The sheep looked up to their secular and religious leaders to be fed, but instead were fed up. In contrast Jesus taught them. He provided them with spiritual and at times, physical food. He healed their sick and forgave the sinners.

Jesus' mission was to reconcile Jews and Gentiles to God as a united body. He did this through his self-offering on the cross for here the new covenant between God and his people was sealed and the Church was born. A new humanity of God's people was created and called to be one as Jesus and the Father are one.

Sadly the unity within God's new people was short lived and this damages the ability of the Church to carry out its mission of proclaiming God's truth. The more things change, the more they stay the same. One of the reasons for our disunity is the view among many Christians that an individual's conscience is the only authority that must be followed. That is true, but the role of conscience is not to decide which moral norms to accept or reject. It is to decide how to apply the revealed moral norms of God as understood by the Church when it is not immediately obvious. This is why it is important for Catholic Christians to have a well-formed conscience. Conscience that acts solely on feelings is unreliable because feelings tend to change from day to day.

In his latest book, "Things to die for," Archbishop Charles Chaput was asked what disappoints him the most about the Church. He says, "I am troubled by the many people who don't believe what the Church teaches but still claim to be Catholic. These try to change Catholic life to reflect their views rather than admitting that they are no longer Catholic and find a different community that shares their views" (p 193).

Having created God in their own image, they are hell bent on making the Church in their own likeness. Chaput goes on, "I've also been disappointed by the lack of courage from bishops who would rather keep the peace than proclaim the fullness of the gospel." These are the false shepherds of today. He states that Prudence is a virtue but becomes a vice when it replaces courage on matters of principle.

Alongside this, Chaput and others are encouraged by those laity and clergy who simply want to be good Catholics and are faithful to Jesus in tough circumstances, be that in their family situation or in the moral dilemmas of our age, and also in the fact that despite the Church's failings and weaknesses, people still become Catholic laity, while others offer themselves for ordination or to the Religious Life.

The Church, and that means all of us, must pay less attention to the voices of the world and more to the voice of Jesus through the leadings of the Holy Spirit. We are urged to be of good courage, hold fast to that which is good. Render to no-one evil for evil. Strengthen the fainthearted. Support the weak. Help the afflicted. Show love to everyone. Love and serve the Lord, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit. For the faithful, there is no other way.

Msgr Harry Entwistle

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