
WORD MADE FLESH

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Like Sheep Without a Shepherd*

Jeremiah 23:1-6; Ephesians 2:13-18; Mark 6:30-34

Jeremiah saw the spiritual leaders of his day forsake their task. Teachers, parents, prophets and priests - those who have a vocation to open up the tradition, to nurture the young, to critique institutional and cultural life, and hold-up and celebrate the wonder of being - had lost their moorings or experienced a failure of nerve. They had become the liege servants,

not of a tradition thick with meaning but of progress;
not of the young but of their own self-interest;
not of life-serving institutions but commercial enterprise;
not of the wonder of being but of momentary entertainments.

All of today's texts are distressing texts for they speak to a circumstances we face daily. Examine the leadership in virtually all our public institutions. Examine your own leadership role in home, school, community, church, work and the public world.

During the last few years I have often talked with the faithful and with public servants who grasp what it means to be righteous men and women in our broken world. Everywhere I hear of a deep malaise, a malaise that seems to have our society and culture by the neck precisely because we have forgotten our task, our vocation on behalf of the life of the world. We seem to have been captured by progress, self-interest, commerce and entertainment. We having forsaken our vocation to open up the sources and language of meaning (tradition), to love and nurture the young and shape institutions in service to public life so that all people have an opportunity to be touched and opened to the wonder of being.

The Second Reading speaks of a healing that brings isolated communities back into "one new humanity", a healing that results from the exercise of this vocation. And, in the Gospel, we see Jesus imparting the teaching that touches again the vitality of meaning at the very heart of tradition, that nurtures the spiritually young, and calls each of us out of self-interest and into the wonder of being and a life of compassion for the healing of the world.

Whatever the sources of the malaise which has gripped our present culture and society we are call, by these text, to lead those who are "like sheep without a shepherd." We are called to open for them the life-giving sources to be found beyond the current idolatry of progress, self-interest, commerce and entertainment. We are called to that humble and most human vocation: to open the sources of meaning (tradition), to love and nurture the young and shape institutions in service to public life so that all people have an opportunity to be touched and opened to the wonder of being. Then the malaise will wither.

David J. Goa

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