

[Readings: Jeremiah 23:1-6; Psalm 23; Ephesians 2:13-16; Mark 6:30-34]

Authority. I used to think that authority was rebelled against only by children, teens, and young adults. Now, as we become more educated and sophisticated, it seems that people of all ages – “from eight to eighty” or “one to one hundred” -- are saying, “No one is going to tell ME what to do!” Or, to give at least some leeway, “Tell me why I should do what you are telling me to do, or why I should believe what you are telling me to believe.”

Authoritative attitudes don't help the situation. Remember when we were growing up, and Mom or Dad would say to us: “Do you hear me?” I was too young to respond: “Is that a rhetorical question? I'm not deaf. You are not mute. Yes, I heard you!” Had any of us kids responded that way, Bang! Zoom!

Or how about this one: “Because I said so!” That would end the discussion or the debate. “Because I'm your father!” “Because I'm your mother!” Reason enough.

Why is it then, that when God's Word says so, or the Church says so, we still question their authority? Are we smarter than God? Are we smarter than 2000 years of experience as a Church? How ludicrous, self-serving and pompous it is when we think that way.

Taking our cue from Jesus, we see that approachability is the key to effectiveness in ministry. Unlike some of the other religious leaders of His day who kept a “proper” distance from sinners and from the ritually unclean, Jesus moves easily among people of every social class and both genders. He touches the sick, converses with sinners and empathizes with the voiceless, the marginalized, and all who were looked down upon as being “un-cool” and unimportant. As Pope Francis would say, Jesus smells like His sheep.

Rather than assume a position of authority, Jesus allows His message to be authoritative while using a manner of delivery that was gentle, even meek. Rather than make His importance felt by demanding honors, Jesus serves the needs of other in such a manner that they feel important – important to Him and important to God.

Jesus is always truthful. Jesus does not hesitate to acknowledge sin, hypocrisy and injustice where He finds them. But rather than condemn sinners, He invites them to be transformed by the truth. In all He does and says, Jesus chooses to reflect the mercies of a loving God. He is patient with the weaknesses and failures of those He chooses to share in His ministry. Jesus helps each of His disciples become their best selves in His presence. He does not coerce or force them. Each is free to respond to His loving overtures or not. Jesus leads with strength and conviction, but not with force. For that reason, some of his audience does not believe that He is the true Messiah.

Jesus is a shepherd, not a sovereign. Even when we call Him King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Contrast this to what Jeremiah cries about in our First Reading. From the very time that David was anointed by Samuel, the authority of the rulers of Israel and Judah was divinely intended to be shepherd-like in nature. Ruling in God's name and as God's appointed and anointed representatives, the Jewish rulers were to reign wisely, doing what was just and right for all, from the least to the greatest. Rather than scatter and separate, antagonize or alienate, Israel's shepherd-leaders were to gather, to protect and to ensure the security of those under their care.

Unfortunately, the majority of these rulers proved to be a huge disappointment, choosing themselves over their people and sovereignty over service. For that reason, God promises a personal intervention. A descendant of David would be raised up to shepherd the people wisely and well. This of course, is fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

What kind of a world would we have if our secular and political royalty saw themselves as shepherd-leaders instead of political powers? So many of our medieval saints were kings and queens, princes and princesses who saw their authority as having been given to them not by popular vote but by divine ordinance. Some of our leaders see themselves as gods and not as servants.

Once that crown was on their head, the royal saints of old realized not how much politics, power and prestige they had, but that one day the crown

would be removed and placed at the footstool of a Divine King. That they would have to stand before Him on Judgment Day to make an accounting of what they did with what they had been given. I don't remember the last time in recent history that a President, a Supreme Court Justice a member of Congress, or a Governor or Mayor spoke such words.

Back to the Gospel. Jesus and the disciples have been on mission. And now it is time for a rest. Our Lord, as any good pastor does, calls the disciples back together for a [retreat](#). For leisure. But word spreads quickly.

Crowds gather. They are hungry for the words that Jesus preaches. They are hungry for the healing that he offers.

His heart is moved to pity. In Latin, we refer to this as *miser cordia*. It is the mercy of the heart, the kindness of God reaching out to the gathered crowds. During a Holy Year of Mercy called by Pope Francis in 2015, a song was composed based on the Gospel of Luke: "Be Merciful as the Father is Merciful:" *Misericordes Sicut Pater*. Jesus sees their suffering, and He begins to teach.

Jesus interprets the Scriptures, speaks in parables and announces the kingdom of God. He is teaching about things that matter. He is the shepherd of the sheep that were once without a shepherd, leading them into a world of truth, goodness and beauty. He calls them and us to let our hearts be moved by the suffering of my brothers and sisters. To offer a comforting word, not indifference, to act, not only to speak to those most in need.

St. Paul reminds us in our Second Reading that each human person has within themselves the struggle between good and evil, between service and violence, between sin and grace. Paul tells us that in the redeeming flesh of Christ, the former division is now past. The wall is down. All blends into one. And it is redeemed, made holy. Isn't it a lot easier for you and me to let go and let God help us to heal, to be whole and holy again? To be His shepherd leaders in our Church, in our family, in our parish community, and in our country? AMEN!