

July 21, 2024
16th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Mark 6:30-34

The apostles gathered together with Jesus and reported all they had done and taught. He said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while."

People were coming and going in great numbers, and they had no opportunity even to eat.

So they went off in the boat by themselves to a deserted place.

People saw them leaving and many came to know about it. They hastened there on foot from all the towns and arrived at the place before them.

When he disembarked and saw the vast crowd, his heart was moved with pity for them, for they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.

Background:

Almost each line in today's Gospel paints a new picture. Take the time to take in each scene as it unfolds.

The Gospel text from last week described Jesus sending the Twelve out, entrusting them with his authority over unclean spirits, and exhorting them to preach repentance. The text concluded with a statement that they had been very successful. "The Twelve drove out many demons and they anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them." (Mark 6:13)

In the verses between last Sunday's Gospel and this week's text, Mark reports that Jesus' reputation is spreading. Even King Herod has now learned of him. People are speculating whether Jesus might be Elijah raised from the dead. Herod himself believes that Jesus is John the Baptist come back to life. Then in the next 12 verses Mark reports in some detail how Herod had John the Baptist arrested and beheaded. Having described King Herod at his worst, Mark then turns our attention back to Jesus. In the Gospel text for this week, Jesus receives his apostles as they return from their mission. He continues to invite them to follow his example. In the first chapter of the Gospel, Mark records Jesus having cured the sick and possessed that were brought to him, including Peter's mother-in-law. Then Mark states, "Rising very early before dawn, he [Jesus] left and went off to a deserted place, where he prayed. (Mark 1:35) On that occasion Jesus did not return to heal those attempting to come, despite the urging of the apostles. Jesus takes the apostles away from the crowd so that they can have some privacy and an opportunity for prayers.

This is the only place in Mark's Gospel where the disciples are called apostles. The Greek word that is used here emphasizes the relationship between the one sending and the one being sent. The one being sent is sent as a representative of the one doing the sending. The only authority that the sent person has is that of the sender. Given this type of relationship, it would be expected that when those who have been sent return, they would give a report to the sender. In the opening verse of our Gospel, Mark states simply that the apostles reported back to Jesus all that they had taught and done in his name.

The return of the twelve from distant places would be a reason for suspicion, curiosity, and hope of news from distant lands. Mark states that so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat. The reality may have been that they could not eat with so many guests. In this culture it would have been unthinkable to eat and not invite guests to join you. (Mark 6:31b) Those who were aware of the return of the Twelve were also aware of their needing rest. Travel was difficult. Yet the people followed Jesus and the disciples.

If the return of the disciples was a cause for the local people to seek them out, their attempt to escape to a deserted place would add another layer to their curiosity. The areas between villages and hamlets were dangerous, the region of chaos. It would have been extraordinary that Jesus and the disciples would desire to escape into this area of chaos. These people lived their entire lives avoiding these places. That so many were now willing to set out into the chaos is a window into their desire to discover what Jesus and his disciples were doing.

The image of the people of Israel being like sheep without a shepherd appears several times in the Hebrew Scriptures. This image would have been familiar to Mark's community. Moses prayed that Yahweh would send a new leader for the people so that they would not be like sheep without a shepherd (Nm 27:12). Ezekiel 34:1-31 uses the image to describe the people of Israel, when those who had been entrusted with the care of the people instead used the people and their possessions for their own benefit. The characterization of the people as being like sheep without a shepherd and Jesus beginning to teach them would have been seen as a criticism of the Jewish leadership who abandoned the common people and left them hungry for guidance.

Reflection Questions:

1. Have you ever felt like you were so busy that there was not enough time to eat or sleep? What were you like emotionally at that time?
2. Are you aware of others who are feeling similarly today in your community or even among your family or friends?
3. Have you had people in your life who have given you the opportunity to break away and have some quiet rest? Have you been able to provide that kind of time for others?
4. Do you have times when you break away to spend some time in solitude? Are you feeling a need for that now?
5. What thoughts and feelings come forward as you contemplate spending significant time in a deserted place with God?
6. Can you talk with God about your desire to seek out Jesus, your desire to have some quiet alone time with God, or maybe the things that keep you from finding a quiet solitude to be with God?

The Gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to fr.paul.gallagher.ofm@gmail.com.

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fsccl-calledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

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Excerpts from the readings for July 18, 2021, the Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Woe to the shepherds who mislead and scatter the flock of my pasture, says the Lord.
Therefore, thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, against the shepherds who shepherd my people:
You have scattered my sheep and driven them away.
You have not cared for them, but I will take care to punish your evil deeds.
I myself will gather the remnant of my flock from all the lands to which I have driven them
and bring them back to their meadow; there they shall increase and multiply.
I will appoint shepherds for them who will shepherd them
so that they need no longer fear and tremble; and none shall be missing, says the Lord.
Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up a righteous shoot to David;
as king he shall reign and govern wisely, he shall do what is just and right in the land.
In his days Judah shall be saved, Israel shall dwell in security.
This is the name they give him: "The Lord our justice."

The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want. In verdant pastures he gives me repose;
beside restful waters he leads me; he refreshes my soul.
He guides me in right paths for his name's sake.
Even though I walk in the dark valley I fear no evil; for you are at my side
with your rod and your staff that give me courage.
You spread the table before me in the sight of my foes;
you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
Only goodness and kindness follow me all the days of my life;
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for years to come.

Brothers and sisters: In Christ Jesus you who once were far off have become near by the blood of Christ.
For he is our peace, he who made both one and broke down the dividing wall of enmity,
through his flesh, abolishing the law with its commandments and legal claims,
that he might create in himself one new person in place of the two,
thus establishing peace, and might reconcile both with God, in one body, through the cross,
putting that enmity to death by it. He came and preached peace to you who were far off
and peace to those who were near, for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

The apostles gathered together with Jesus and reported all they had done and taught.
He said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while."
People were coming and going in great numbers, and they had no opportunity even to eat.
So they went off in the boat by themselves to a deserted place.
People saw them leaving and many came to know about it.
They hastened there on foot from all the towns and arrived at the place before them.
When he disembarked and saw the vast crowd, his heart was moved with pity for them,
for they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.

Excerpts from Jeremiah 23:1-6; Psalm 23:1-6; Ephesians 2:13-18; and Mark 6:30-34

Friends,

Here are the Gospel background and reflection questions for July 21st, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. In the Gospel from Mark, the Twelve who were sent out return and report to Jesus,

and he suggests to them, "Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while." People saw them leaving, and many hastened on foot, and a vast crowd arrived at the place before them. Jesus was moved with pity for them, for they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things. The other readings also have references to the sheep, and who is and who is not the shepherd who leads them, and how they do this. In the first reading from Jeremiah, thus says the Lord, "Woe to the shepherds who mislead and scatter the flock. I myself will gather the remnant from all the lands and bring them back. I will raise up a righteous shoot to David; in his days Israel shall dwell in security." Psalm 23 proclaims, "The Lord is my shepherd; beside restful waters he leads me; he guides me in right paths; I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for the years to come." In the second reading, from the letter to the Ephesians, Paul writes, "You who once were far off have become near by the blood of Christ, for he is our peace. Through him we have access in one Spirit to the Father." Jesus has been working increasingly greater miracles in our weekly Gospels, and there is more to come. But the scope is expanding in other ways, too. The miracle-working is now being shared by the apostles, who have successfully been sent not only to preach repentance, but to also drive out demons and cure the sick. And now, recognizing the eager crowd as sheep without a shepherd, Jesus has pity on them, and goes beyond the cures to now begin to teach them many more things.

Joe

> i < May the Word light your way each day!