

**Year B Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**July 22, 2012**  
**Jer 23:1-6; Ps 23; Eph 2:13-18; 1:3-14; Mk 6:30-34**

The topic this Sunday centers on the Good Shepherd, what the Good Shepherd does and who he is. The first reading from the prophet Jeremiah can be considered a classic prediction of the coming of the Messiah. Note the context and what is said. In the period of the Babylonian Exile (587-538 B.C.), the people of Israel have many complaints about their rulers, called “shepherds” in the Bible (primarily kings, but it can include religious leaders, too; see Ez 22:23-31). The conduct of these shepherds has caused the disintegration of the “sheep;” see the longer version of this passage in Ez 34. A good leader keeps the sheep together, united (compare King Solomon’s excesses and sins, which caused the division of the people of God into two kingdoms; see 1 Kgs 11:1-13). Evil conduct causes the sheep to be scattered, all over the place, and prey to their enemies. The good shepherd seeks the lost sheep, makes her lie down to eat, cures the ill, makes return the stray; all this is laid out in Ez 34, especially in verses 14-16, and was fulfilled by Christ, who hosted meals with the lost sheep, who reclined at table in festive fashion, and who said he was a physician, Mk 2:15-17.

The Jeremiah reading talks about “days that are coming” (in the End Time), when God will *raise up* for David (who had been promised a son with an eternal throne, 2 Sm 7:12-16; cf. Lk 1:26-33) a “righteous Sprout” (or Branch, or Shoot), an “insightful king” who will save the tribe of Judah. These terms are all very important. The “raise” verb is the same as the one used for “resurrection” (see Acts 3:22; Jr 30:9, etc.). “Sprout,” an agricultural term, became synonymous with “Messiah;” see especially Zec 6:12, where the Greek version calls the Messiah-Sprout “Anatole,” the rising sun, as in the Benedictus, Lk 1:78, and in Mal 3:20. The Word of God “sprouts forth” from the ground after it comes out of God’s mouth, not returning to God until it has accomplished the purpose for which it was sent, Is 55:10-11; this in fact is a summary of John’s gospel!

The second reading from Ephesians is one of my favorites: it declares abolished the historical purpose of the Torah (the Five Books of Moses, the Pentateuch), which was to *separate* Jew and pagan as light from darkness and pure from impure (see Gn 1:1-18; Lv 20:22-26; Nm 23:9; 1 Kgs 8:53), in order to fulfill its theological purpose: the restoration of humanity as a unity, a communion, in Christ (to which the Torah *pointed*, Jn 5:46; Rom 10:4). Christ, in

his Body, has broken down *the dividing wall of enmity*, like the Good Shepherd bringing all the sheep together (Jn 10:11-16), both those near and far. Is our tendency today toward this communion, or are our leaders breeding division, polarization, fear, anger and hatred?

We need leaders like Jesus, who instead of dismissing the 'hungry and tired masses' gave them to eat, despite the disciples' little faith and stinginess. He saw they were like sheep without a shepherd, and so had to teach them many things . . .