

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B)

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Mario Michiaki Yamanouchi
Bishop of the Diocese of Saitama

Brothers and Sisters,

Today we first hear again from Jeremiah, one of the four major prophets in the Old Testament. Jeremiah lived between 650-585 BC in Judah, Jerusalem, Babylon and Egypt. He was a contemporary of Ezekiel and before Daniel.

First Reading (Jeremiah 23:1-6): I will gather my sheep and give them shepherds

Why did Jeremiah have to speak so harshly? Because the oracle of the Lord demanded that the kings of Judah of his time, Josiah, Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, urgently change their behaviors. The result was that Jeremiah was subjected to many restrictions and accusations by those kings and other important people in Israel. He was flogged, thrown into the cistern and imprisoned, and he had to endure all the chaotic and unjust conditions and forced displacement. The people had to suffer as well, because those in charge and certain groups of people wanted to gain personally. That's why God needed to appoint new shepherds.

Message of the First Reading

The problems of that era were becoming more serious because the leaders of the peoples had to follow the international economic order. They had plans but couldn't find any concrete clues to them especially because they had to find a united political will among those who governed the world. In today's world there is even more of that reality. We do have injustice and migration. May the words of Jeremiah help us today to believe that justice can be done in our world.

Today too we have prophets who are being persecuted, tortured and killed,

because those prophets, like Jeremiah, seek to protect in the name of God those who are hindered and enslaved by the economic system created by the powers of the world.

Second Reading (Ephesians 2:13-18): Jesus Christ has made one people

The Second Reading describes the situation faced by the newly-born Christian community into the Judaism world, that is, the struggle with the Judaizers Paul and the Gentile Christians had to face.

Perhaps it seems to us that Paul was very successful in his preaching in the cities of the Greek world as well as in Rome. No, he suffered much misunderstanding and envy from many. He was criticized, imprisoned, beaten and finally martyred for his convictions.

Paul fought tirelessly to proclaim that the dividing wall of all injustice, antagonism and slavery has fallen away through Jesus Christ. Paul's openness to the idea that all people are children of God in Jesus, transcending ethnicity and culture, gave rise to many Christian communities in the cities of the Greek-speaking Hellenistic world. Paul was convinced that the Gospel of Jesus had a universal message and he shared it with people. It was a revolutionary message that would break down social, political, economic and cultural walls and make all men and women brothers and sisters.

Gospel (Mark 6:30-34): Jesus, the compassionate shepherd of the crowd

Today's Gospel begins with a plain description that the Apostles who had returned from the first gospel mission came to Jesus and reported all that they had done and taught. We can imagine a beautiful scene of Jesus listening to their report with joy. When Jesus finished hearing the report, he wanted to reward them for their work and give them a rest, so he and the Twelve went off in the boat by themselves to a deserted place.

But Jesus' purpose was frustrated. The crowd from all the surrounding villages and towns had discovered his intention and ran ahead of him along the shore.

How did Jesus react? Mark describes it as follows: “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.” (Mark 6:34)

What is described here is addressed to the Christian communities. The evangelist insists that Christians have to remember how Jesus acted towards those who were lost in anonymity, whom nobody cared about.

Gospel message

In our communities we must learn to look at others with the gaze of Jesus. Let us remember how important it is to capture the loneliness, bewilderment or abandonment that so many people suffer. Let us remember that compassion is awakened when we look attentively at those who suffer.

For the people of those days, the attitude and the way of the teachers of the Law did not help them to experience the presence of God in their lives because their teaching was away from the people’s real problems. But what Jesus teaches is totally different. He says that if we open our hearts, we can notice those who are suffering, and naturally from the depths of our hearts we will overflow with compassion, giving them the food they need and reaching out to those who are sick. Jesus was the true physician, who had the power to heal the body, which is one with the soul.

We too need to experience the compassionate heart of Jesus so that we can be as compassionate as he is to others, especially to those who are suffering. May we ask for the gift of being as compassionate to others as Jesus is. And this can only be achieved by living as his disciples with joy.

Note: All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New American Bible, Revised Edition (NABRE).