

JULY 22, 2018



SIXTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME



JEREMIAH 23:1-6

PSALM 23:1-3, 3-4, 5, 6

EPHESIANS 2:13-18

MARK 6:30-34

REFLECTION

This week's readings focus on the idea of unity within the family of God. They do this by focusing on the commonly used example of the shepherd and the sheep. Scripture often uses this kind of imagery to reveal that God cares for each of his sheep, protects them from harm, and finds them when they go astray. In these readings, though, the focus turns from God's relationship with the individual sheep to the relationship of the entire flock to one another and to the Shepherd.

The prophet Jeremiah shows how God lovingly gathers together the sheep who have been "scattered . . . and driven . . . away" (v. 2). The letter to the Ephesians tells us how Christ, the Good Shepherd, "broke down the dividing wall of enmity" (v. 14) between the members of the flock, creating unity between them. In the Gospel, Jesus gathers those who desire to follow him, and he begins "to teach them many things" (v. 34).

Christ continues to gather the flock today in the Church. Often, this brings to mind a building or a group of bishops and clergy. But the Church is defined as "the People of God." Christ binds all of us together as his flock so that we can seek his truth as a unified body!

But what happens when my deeply held beliefs conflict with someone else's, especially where faith is concerned? It's easy to get frustrated or angry when our deepest convictions are on the line. But we must follow Christ's example by offering one another a place at the table, respectfully listening to one another in the spirit of good will, and genuinely seeking the truth—guided by the wisdom of the Church. Only then will we truly model the flock that Christ has called us into.

ACTION

Each Sunday at Mass, we pray together the Universal Prayer (Prayer of the Faithful). Catholics around the world pray together for the Church, public authorities and the salvation of the world, the oppressed, and the local community. Pay special attention to the Universal Prayer when you go to Mass this weekend. How might it be a starting point for us to seek out respectful dialogue in situations where our strongly held beliefs differ from another member of the flock?

JOURNALING QUESTIONS

● Have you ever had a disagreement with someone over our deeply held beliefs? How did you respond? How is Christ calling you to greater unity within the Church?