

16th Sunday Ordinary Time

We are prone to react to the world by how it might benefit us. We make ourselves the standard of all relationships. Today's readings take a different viewpoint. They unfold a world in which personal growth comes from concern for the community. They view the identification of the shepherd in terms of the sheep.

The first reading speaks of this shepherding. In the ancient near east, shepherd was the title for a king. By the very nature of the title shepherd, we see the ideal relationship between the heads of state and their subjects. The kings of Israel and Judah did not fulfill this vision of providing and caring for their people. Words like scattered, driven away, and not attended to are used. Yahweh intervenes: "I myself will gather the remnant of my flock. I will raise up shepherds over them."

In the second reading, Paul speaks of Christ's cross bringing the far off to the nearby. Christ unites all people in himself. There is no longer a border between Gentile and Jew. Gentiles have full access to the family of God. There is a new humanity taken from what Adam has separated and it is brought to fruition in what Christ has united. The king shepherds his flock.

The Gospel episode is the prelude to the feeding of the 5,000. Upon return from their "pastoral experience", Jesus sees the apostles' need for rest and solitude. The stage is set for further use of shepherd/royal imagery in feeding the 5,000. Jesus sees the need of the "sheep without a shepherd." He responds by teaching and subsequently feeding them. Jesus is the compassionate shepherd.