

Homily for the 16th Sunday of the Year

Leadership has been in the news recently whether this has been that of Gareth Southgate, the England manager, or the leaders of the 4 home nations, all of whom are taking us forward slightly differently through the next stage of the pandemic. All of us will have our own thoughts on how well or otherwise our leaders are doing, sometimes offering praise, at other times criticism. God speaking through the prophet Jeremiah in today's first reading is certainly critical of the leaders of God's people in the middle of the 6th century before the birth of Christ.

At the heart of this criticism is not only their failure to care for the people but to allow them to be destroyed and scattered. We might think of those countries today where leadership is oppressive, people living in fear for their lives, desperate to escape to other countries where they will have a chance of a better life. Or we think of those refugees who this week were being turned back from the island of Lesbos being refused permission to land, even being fired on by soldiers on the shore. We might also think of the mixed messages we have received, and continue to receive during this covid pandemic.

As well as criticism in the first reading there is also a promise, God saying – "I will raise up shepherds to look after them, to pasture them, no fear, no terror for them any more, not one shall be lost." The idea of a leader as a shepherd is taken up in the psalm, arguably the best known psalm of them all. The shepherd leader knows what the people need, whether this is pasture or rest, guidance or revival, being comforted or walking without fear, being wonderfully fed, anointed with the finest oil, having everything that is needed, and most of all living under the shadow of God.

In John's gospel Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd, who will lay down his life for his sheep. Therein lies the quality of leadership, someone who knows the needs of the people and who is willing to fulfil those needs with integrity, vision, courage and humility even at great personal cost. And, as we have been hearing this Sunday and last, someone who recognises that they cannot work alone but rather works collaboratively. When Jesus sent out the Twelve last week they were not the finished article, it was a risk on his part, but they went, travelling light, and sharing his authority. On their return, Jesus recognises their need for rest and recuperation, something we all need especially when we are being worn down by circumstances which are out of our control, so he invites them to come away with him to a deserted place. This didn't work out as intended because people had made the place far from deserted. We can only imagine how the disciples felt when Jesus put their own needs on the back foot, and reached out to those who were there. Sometimes our plans don't work out as we intended as we know only too well. Our reading ends with Jesus teaching the people at some length, this will be followed next week by Jesus feeding the people with a few loaves and fish. Most of us exercise leadership in one form or another and Jesus is the model for all leaders whoever they are.

Bidding Prayers for the 16th Sunday – Dedication of the Cathedral Church of St Anne

Celebrant:

Christ is our shepherd. We turn to him in prayer so that he may guide the world with peace and harmony.

Reader:

For the diocese of Leeds on this feast of the dedication of the Cathedral Church of St Anne –that God will continue to bless the people of the diocese as they promote God’s kingdom on earth.

Lord in your mercy

For our political and civic leaders – that like Christ, the Good Shepherd, they will lead their people with courage, integrity and compassion, recognising the needs of all.

Lord in your mercy

For those who are suffering in body, mind or spirit – that they and their families will receive the support and love they need at this time.

Lord in your mercy

For ourselves – that we will take time each day to quietly attend to the voice of God speaking to us either directly or through other people and events.

Lord in your mercy

For those who have died, all victims of violence, accident, natural disasters and the Covid 19 pandemic, for John Anthony Avery who died last Sunday and Margaret Booth, Josephine Uttley, Josef Flaschka, Joan Anderton, Norah Buckley and Lydia Gartside whose anniversaries occur this week – that they and all who have died may rest in peace and rise in glory.

Lord in your mercy

Either aloud or in silence we pray for our own special intentions...pause...then

Lord in your mercy

We ask the prayers of Mary as we say, Hail Mary...

Celebrant:

All loving God, your Son drew great strength from the time he spent with you in prayer and he showed the disciples the need to do the same. May we never grow weary of quiet time with you so that life around us may be kept in balance. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen