

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time B2018

The readings of this Sunday talk about leadership. They show that good leadership is that which is preoccupied for the wellbeing of people in the name of whom it is exercised. They invite us to ponder on the way we exercise our own leadership, each one according to his level of command.

The first reading describes God's denunciation of bad leaders who have not lived up to the task entrusted to them. Then, it announces God's punishment of them for their evil deeds. Finally, the text announces God's leadership of his people by taking care of them and by providing them with good shepherds.

What is behind this text is the idea that those who lead are stewards who exercise their authority on behalf of God. There is also the idea that good leaders are those preoccupied for the good of those entrusted to them. The last idea is related to the truth that where human beings fail in their obligation, God supplies what is lacking for the good of his people.

This text helps us understand the point of today's Gospel as Jesus shows his disciples the right way that can enhance their spiritual leadership. First of all, the Gospel starts with the mention of the apostles who come back and report to Jesus what they have done in the mission.

Then, it speaks of the invitation of Jesus to the apostles that they get some rest by withdrawing to a deserted place. After that, the Gospel makes mention of people who were looking for Jesus. Finally, the text gives the reaction of Jesus who had pity on those people who were like sheep without a shepherd.

What do we learn from today's readings? Today I want to talk about the importance of good leadership. First of all what is leadership? Leadership is the practice or the process of guiding people or organization in the pursuit of a given goal. A leader, then, is someone who stands in a position of command or influence for the benefit of those entrusted to him.

Modern culture teaches us that the growth and the prosperity of peoples and nations depend, to a large extent, on the quality of leadership provided. Good leadership can empower people; it can contribute to the development of their nation. Bad leadership can prevent the development of a nation; it can contribute to the destruction of a people.

In biblical terms, leadership is mostly assimilated to stewardship. A steward is someone who exercises his authority on behalf of another who is the true owner of the task he is handling. It is in that sense that in the first reading of Jeremiah, God denounces the shepherds who mislead the people and even scatter them. It is also in that sense that God rebukes them and even proposes to take the fate of the sheep in his own hands by giving to his people the right leaders.

This denunciation from God raises the question of what we can do in order to assure good leadership. From the reading of the Gospel, three things have to be highlighted. First, a good leader should have always at heart the good of those entrusted to him. He has to do everything in his power and according to his skills and abilities that his own might be happy. He has to provide for the needs of his beloved ones.

In the Gospel, Jesus shows this quality by letting his heart be moved to pity as he saw the crowd wandering like sheep without a shepherd. In other words, compassion is the beginning of action. Without feeling compassion for people, we can do nothing for them. If we want to be a good leader, we have to start feeling the pain and the suffering of others.

Second, a good leader should always evaluate the mission given to him by the Lord. In fact, it is striking to realize that once the apostles came back from the mission, they gave an account of what they had done and taught. To come back to the Lord means to come back to the source that gives us strength to keep working wisely. It means also to recognize that we are not our own boss, but servants who have to do the job according to what the master has recommended. Any leader, who is not able to sincerely assess his action and the result achieved with the Lord, runs the risk of giving free rein to competition and of being concerned only with the statistics.

This is why, the apostles who “gather together” around Jesus and assess with him what they have done, represent the community that keeps in constant touch with the Lord. Without continual contact with Christ, those who work for him can easily become just mere functionaries. Can any worker do a job without first learning from a master what he is supposed to do? And after finishing his task, is it not normal that he goes back again to ask him if he has done it in the right way?

Third, the words that Jesus addresses to the apostles: “*Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while*”, are very instructive and full of consequences with regard to the understanding of leadership.

In fact, we like active people, in particular priests, deacons and workers, who run after a hundred things and accomplish them without complaining. This way of working, however, ends up in “*activism*”. What is bad, however, is that *activism kills* the essence of the work of God, because what is accomplished this way is very often done in pursuit of success. When the goal pursued is success, the tendency is to cling to what is external than internal, to look for a good result at any cost.

Jesus invites us to stop, to take a break and withdraw in silence in order to find strength in prayer and meditation. Whenever the Christian community does not stop to consider with the Lord the initiative it takes, it will inevitably follow human logic and judge its planned activity only in terms of success, statistics and conquests. It is important to stop, ponder in silence and pray about what we do. Otherwise we will keep doing it for the Lord, but without the Lord.

Let us ask God to pour out upon us his Holy Spirit so that we listen to Jesus, the good shepherd of our lives. Let us pray that we find our strength in the word of Jesus through meditation and the sharing of the Gospel. May God bless you all!

Jeremiah 23: 1-6; Ephesians 2: 13-18; Mark 6: 30-34



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