

## “Shepherd Your Flock Like Jesus”

16<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time (Cycle B)

Jer 23:1-6; Ps 23; Eph 2:13-18; Jn 10:27; Mk 6:30-34

A common theme throughout our Scripture readings:

- Shepherds and shepherding

First Reading – thru the prophet Jeremiah

- God says, *“Woe to the shepherds who mislead and scatter the flock...”*
- *“I myself will gather the remnant of my flock...”* (pointing to Jesus)
- *“I will appoint shepherds for them ...”* (Apostles ~> bishops, priests)

Responsorial Psalm

- *“the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want”*

Gospel

- *“they were like sheep without a shepherd”*

Talk about “shepherding” = talk about spiritual **leadership**

### 1. **Spiritual Leadership is something we may not often think about**

- And if we do at all, it’s probably in the context of
  - Bishop, Priest or Deacon – so SL really doesn’t really apply to me

\*\*Reality is we are all called to be spiritual leaders in various ways in various flocks throughout life

Jobs/Career path

- Whether in Management or a “Worker Bee” – can have
  - Positive spiritual influence on others around us

The same opportunities exist at:

## School

- Teams, band, clubs, etc
- Upperclassmen in particular
  - 5<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> grades
    - big man on campus
    - younger kids are watching you
      - learning from you
      - whether you notice it or not...

## SL in our Social Lives

- Within circle of friends
- Boyfriend-girlfriend relationships

## Church certainly offers SL opportunities

- Youth Group, Men's/Women's Group, Sodality, KoC
- Note: don't have to be in actual leadership position to lead....
  - Don't have to be the oldest, the upperclassman, the designated manager
  - Younger children can lead their older siblings & classmates
  - Children can lead their parents
  - Many times we're called to "lead from within" the ranks

Bottom line: our lives are

- Chock full of opportunities (indeed *responsibilities*) to lead

## **Arguably the highest of our spiritual leadership responsibilities**

- Family -- Microcosm of the Church...
  - Husbands – called to be: priest of the home
    - What a *tremendous* responsibility

- Doesn't mean you do it all yourself
  - You & your wife are truly a team/unit
  - But husbands, you should be taking the lead...
  - Too many times we men
    - spiritual followers in the family

## 2. Regarding SL, in first reading, I remind you:

God says, "*Woe to the shepherds who mislead...*"

- *they will be punished*
- Most are quite good at fostering the physical & mental growth of our children
  - Yet give lower priority to spiritual growth
- So often
  - Spirituality is on the periphery of our lives
    - rosary on review mirror, medal around our neck
    - accent piece vice foundation
  - Spiritual life is our Foundation
    - Whether we want it to be or not
      - Even whether we *believe* it or not
  - Spiritual Life is like the base of the pyramid
    - Pyramid is great example of proper balance of
      - mind, body & soul
      - Soul/spiritual life is the broad base
      - Body/physical life is the small peak
      - Mind/mental life is in the middle
      - ALL 3 very important, but we tend to
        - Overemphasize the pinnacle
        - At the expense of the foundation

- Landscape is littered with fallen
    - Professional athletes
    - Entertainers
    - Politicians
      - Seemed to have it all and yet crashed so spectacularly
  - Their physical attributes were honed to near perfection
  - Ultimately collapsed due to a weak spiritual foundation
- Jesus so pointedly asks in the Gospels:
  - *“What good is it to gain the whole world, but lose your soul..?”* (Mk 8:36)
    - *but lose your soul..?”* (Mk 8:36)

## Let's Get More Specific:

### 3 Examples of Where Many Families Struggle in Spiritual Leadership

#### 1. Sports & Mass – you know the drill

- Drive ourselves crazy w/ nonstop sports
  - Age 4 thru 18
  - Spring soccer – MD families drive 100 miles to VA
    - VA families drive 100 miles to MD... (Craziest thing!)
    - Get several kids in one family doing that – praying for the gift of bi-location!
  - Summer practices & scrimmages...
  - Late summer tryouts for school soccer in Fall....
  - Very next w/e – Indoor Soccer (gotta keep that foot on the ball... don't want to get rusty...)
  - Spring Soccer travel leagues...

- Challenging because
  - Physical activity is healthy; Team sports are healthy
  - Fun; arguably “family time” right?
  - Sure beats kids sitting at home playing X-Box!
- But somewhere along the way we start losing control
  - Start noticing: Mass squeezed in around sports
    - vice sports around Mass
    - and we never seem to have a chance to rest
  - Sunday – meant to be a day of family rest
    - Reemphasized by Jesus in today’s Gospel
      - You need some down time; come away by yourselves to a quiet place and rest...
    - We’ve made Sunday
      - Or at least we’ve allowed Sunday to be made into
        - just another day of the week to cram stuff into
      - Will Not change until
        - Coaches, Parents, Kids
          - Show leadership and make it change
  - My 2 cents:
    - Saturday – should play soccer, lacrosse, baseball, etc
      - 6am to midnight [under the lights]
    - Let Sunday – day of rest we all need!

## 2. D/O kids at Church and do our own thing

- “Go north son”
  - Where’re you going Dad?
  - I’m going SE – but don’t you worry ‘bout me...
    - Get on in there and be a good boy...
- There’s a concept called “Leadership by Example”
  - In those moments, you ARE leading (in the wrong direction)
- Teaching them: Church is for kids; not as much for adults...

- What a tragedy
  - We're leading by example whether we want to or not...
  - How can we expect to safely lead our children thru the dense and dangerous jungles of life
  - When we're not really on board ourselves...
  - When we don't bother to look at our own spiritual compass
- 3. Closely related: Huge misconception: Confirmation = graduation
  - Remember what call our newly confirmed brothers & sisters?
    - "Neophyte" – beginner, fledgling, trainee, rookie...
  - They are literal newborns into the church and
  - We seem to think we're "done" with their spiritual upbringing...
    - when it's really only just begun!
    - Some families even stop going to Mass at all...
    - And wonder why just a few years later, little Johnny or Susie find themselves in a world of trouble
      - Drifted *Miles* off the straight & narrow path..
      - "Well I just don't know what happened...
        - We took 'em to church the first 14 yrs of their life...!"
  - Jesus said, "*Behold, I send you out as sheep amongst the wolves!*" (Mt 10:16)
    - He was using that analogy on His Apostles
    - Our children on Confirmation day are not on par with the Apostles
      - Send them out as a little lambs amongst wolves...

Nobody says it's easy, but

Leadership is not a popularity contest – especially Parental Leadership

- You're not called to be your child's friend...

- You're called to be their Father/Mother -- Shepherd
  - Do that properly and when your child matures
    - Then you will have their appreciation & friendship

*"Woe to the shepherds who mislead..."*

### 3. So how do we become better shepherds of our flock?

- **No shortage of examples of Christ's leadership in today's readings – with just a cursory look we see...**
  1. From our Second reading (letter to Ephesians)
    - Christ's highest concern was our relationship with God
    - Even sacrificing himself on the cross that we might have life everlasting
  2. Gospel Acclamation – Jesus says "I know them, and they follow me"
    - Jesus knew his sheep. Apparent in
  3. Mark's Gospel – apostles returned from a mission (sent on last wk)
    - they were hungry & tired
      - Jesus listened to their experiences and
      - sought to give them rest
    - Knowing his sheep – their strengths & weaknesses
      - knew when to push them
      - knew when to give them rest
  4. Also from Mark's gospel -- Despite being hungry & tired himself
    - Jesus gave and gave – putting well-being of the flock
      - ahead of himself...
      - Saw the mass of people – *"like sheep w/o a shepherd"*
      - hungry for spiritual leadership
      - He began to teach them many things

- leading them beside the still waters; restoring their soul; leading them in the paths of righteousness
  - as so beautifully articulated in our 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm

5. Led by example – He embodied the high standards that he encouraged the Apostles and crowds to reach for

- Never asking His flock to do anything
  - he wasn't prepared to do himself

In short, Jesus “talked the talk”, but He also “walked the walk”

- And that is Inspiring – that is leadership

Our world – our churches – our families are in need of this kind of spiritual leadership.

#### **4. What are our Opportunities for Spiritual Leadership? They're there**

- Most every day, if our spiritual eyes and ears are open
- Msgr Gregory (founder of Mustard Seed charity, Jamaica)
  - A male version of Mother Teresa
  - A major part of his spirituality
    - When I see a problem – a need; brokenness/pain
    - View it as if God placed in front of me for a reason:
      - that He might answer prayer, meet that need, thru me
    - what an incredible way to live your life!
  - I witnessed a beautiful example of this last weekend
    - Joined the Youth Group on a retreat to Steubenville, OH
    - Returning home, stopped at a Cracker Barrel restaurant
    - Homeless man across the street
      - I'll be honest -- I didn't notice him at all...
      - But thankfully your Youth Group did (!)

- Took it upon themselves to rifle thru their pockets, collecting \$35
  - to present to him as a gift card
  - probably good for 3 meals
- THAT's Spiritual Leadership
  - Spiritual eyes & ears open
    - Tuned in to the promptings of the HS
  - Seeing a problem
    - Feeling compassion
    - Showing initiative & judgement to meet the need
  - The man was very thankful and I was very inspired...
  - Imagine if we all walked thru our daily lives with that spiritual mindset – what a change we'd see in our world

## 5. Conclude by asking a question - Who's your leader?

- Is that relevant? – I AM the leader...
  - Extremely relevant: “The best leaders are also great followers...”
  - Who is your leader? And are you following Him?
- Hard to be a good shepherd when you're not tuned in
  - to “The Good Shepherd”
- Must get our own spiritual life in order
  - Frequent Mass, confession
    - Don't wait until mortal sin to go to confession
  - Read Scripture daily (if only 5 min)
  - Begin each day with a Prayer, something to this effect:
    - Heavenly Father, Open my spiritual eyes and ears
      - guide my conversations
      - make me an instrument of your peace...
      - Lead me, guide me, grant me the grace to follow

## Brothers and Sisters

- I challenge you to “Shepherd your flock like Jesus”
- and it will never be said of your flock:
  - *“They were like sheep without a shepherd...”*