

[Spirituality](#)  
[Scripture for Life](#)



(Pixabay/Antranas)



by Mary M. McGlone

[View Author Profile](#)

## [\*\*Join the Conversation\*\*](#)

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. [Learn more](#)

July 21, 2018

[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)

## Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

[July 22, 2018](#)

Jeremiah 23:1-6

Psalms 23

Ephesians 2:13-18

Mark 6:30-34

"Woe to the shepherds who mislead and scatter the flock!" This is a favorite theme of prophets, parishioners who are not happy with their pastors, and folks who want to bash the hierarchy or critique politicians who foment divisiveness. But pay attention! In today's readings the role of critic belongs to God who then hands humanity the task of remediation.

Even our beloved Psalm 23, that promise of green pastures and restful waters, gives us precious little time to rest before God leads us along paths that include a long walk in a dark valley before we get to the Lord's banquet table. Our shepherd has a mission in mind for us.

That's the lesson brought home to the poor disciples whom Jesus invited on a getaway in today's Gospel. They had just returned from their first foray into mission. They were so excited about all they had accomplished that they didn't even mention that John the Baptist had been executed while they were on the road. That should have been a hint to them about the things to come, but maybe they were avoiding the topic on purpose.

Perhaps it was the combination of things — the apostles' success, John's death and the relentless crowds — that gave Jesus the idea they should hop a boat and disappear. Whatever his intention, it turned out to be a time of teaching. The obvious teaching was the "many things" that Mark tells us Jesus taught the crowds. More important was what he taught the disciples.

Mark tells the story in his typical stark style, leaving it to the readers to mine the wealth of meaning he hides in each phrase. The most telling sentence of this Gospel

says that when Jesus saw the people looking for him, "his heart was moved with pity ... for they were like sheep without a shepherd."

The word translated as *pity* means that Jesus' guts were wrenched as he saw them. This is like the feeling of parents who see their child in real pain. The people's hunger, their heartfelt search, their longing for more, called Jesus forth. He allowed their need to turn him into a shepherd.

That was Jesus' lesson for the disciples. Beyond anything words could explain, they saw how he identified with the needs that appeared before him. He was showing his followers that if they wanted to carry forth his mission, they had to feel the real needs of the people. Only then would they know what they had to offer.



(Mark Bartholomew)

Pope Francis explains this in *Evangelii Gaudium* ("The Joy of the Gospel") when he says that an evangelizing community gets involved in people's daily lives, it bridges

difference and is even willing to abase itself if necessary (24). Lest we be too concerned for efficiency and our free time, Francis also reminds us that something lovers understand instinctively applies to our mission as well: "Evangelization consists mostly of patience and disregard for constraints of time."

Jesus went off to rest with his disciples and, although he may not have planned it that way, their lost retreat turned into one of the most important and memorable times they spent with him. Jesus' response to this crowd would lead to the great communion among the multitude that we will contemplate for the next few weeks, and it all began because Jesus saw that the people needed a shepherd.

Today's readings won't allow us to sit back and criticize our leaders. Instead, they invite us to look at what is lacking in our church and society and allow the hungers of our world to call us forth as the crowd called Jesus. One of the most beautiful texts from the Second Vatican Council states, "The joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted, are the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well" (*Gaudium et Spes* , 1).

Christ's followers must look at our world and ask what deep and truly human hopes and hungers are being unconsciously expressed in the blind competition of sports fans, the addictions that plague every strata of society, supremacy movements and all the isms that divide our people. Some political leaders benefit from discord and some religious figures make a fortune as they encourage us to wait for everything to be resolved in heaven. Neither the Gospel nor Vatican II supports such approaches.

## Advertisement

Francis puts the call clearly when he says in *Evangelii Gaudium*, "I hope that all communities will devote the necessary effort to advancing along the path of a pastoral and missionary conversion which cannot leave things as they presently are" (25). As the saying goes, "Be the change you wish to see in the world." Today's liturgy tells us to become the shepherds our world needs.

[Mary M. McGlone is a Sister of St. Joseph of Carondelet who is writing the history of the Sisters of St. Joseph in the U.S.]

**Editor's note:** This Sunday scripture commentary appears in full in NCR's sister publication Celebration, a worship and homiletic resource. Request a sample issue at [CelebrationPublications.org](http://CelebrationPublications.org). Sign up to receive [email newsletters](#) every time Spiritual Reflections is posted.

A version of this story appeared in the **July 13-26, 2018** print issue under the headline: The shepherds we need.