

Homily. 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time. Year.B. 17/18 July 2021.

Leadership, that most important and elusive trait, that gift of the 'gods' has been and always will remain vital for us. Real leaders enable us to integrate our past, make sense of our present and find our way into the future, dimly glimpsed as it may be. Conversely, deficient and bad leaders only muddy the waters leading us by endless loops and back roads to a nowhere place, a social desert of division, inequality, illness and unrest.

Jesus was known by many titles in His day, but the two that stand out and are relevant here are those of Master and Teacher. He was a leader, that is a Master in seeing reality as it truly was, tapping helpfully into the energies of His age and situation for the good of the many. He was a wise, insightful and compassionate Teacher who drew people to Himself because He cared about them and was able to recognise, speak to and go some way towards meeting their deepest needs and aspirations.

Unlike Jesus, you and I are merely disciples doing our best, stumbling along with whatever lights and skills we can muster. Still, His example must both challenge and inspire us, and His Spirit dwelling within us must be liberated in our lives so that we can trace today, however faintly, His gifts and charisms with the words and deeds of our lives.

Much needing rest and time out from the incessant needs of so many, St. Mark says that Jesus took His disciples away to what was supposed to be a quiet place, but no quiet was to be found. I can feel the disciples hearts sinking when they made shore and saw the big crowd gathered. What would we have done in their situation? Shuddered; become disheartened

and depressed; let ourselves be frustrated, angry even that our small break was being denied to us? Most likely some or all and even more of these reactions I suggest.

What Jesus did was take the action that He could for Himself and for His disciples. He put Himself out in front of them, taught the crowd at some length and shielding His disciples from this work allowed them to melt away into the background. This is what real leaders and good teachers do. It's what masterful leaders and caring teachers with the pastoral heart of the good shepherd do. There's a lot of wisdom, a true compassion for others, a real insight into what can and what cannot be in Jesus example and more than a scintilla of common sense to boot.

Measured by these standards many if not most of our leaders in every field and endeavour have more often fallen short than near, let alone get close to striking the bulls-eye. No wonder, then, that awful abuses have been allowed to flourish, that people have become cynical and alienated from systems, communities and groups, that division and conflicts thrive and that self-preservation and selfishness abound. A masterful teacher and good shepherd understands that they are the servants of the people and that sacrifice for others is the name of the game. In fact, every parent and partner worth talking about in practice understands this, too.

So, in this desperate, scattered and divided time of ours we, as Eucharist people, people who give thanks and take into ourselves the Lord's sacrifice, have to focus our eyes and hearts on the Lord's way. We call upon the energies of His Spirit to correct, to heal and to inspire our ways, ever admitting our dependance on His mercy and guidance. For, it is only

when we let ourselves be taught, cared for, protected and led by the One Master and Teacher worthy of our attention that we can lead and feed others in the way that He asks us to do.