

Homily – Mark 6: 30-34
16th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B
Vigil Mass, 17th July 2021, Riverstown

“As He stepped ashore, He saw a large crowd; and He took pity on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd”.

Mother Teresa once happened to visit a nursing home in Calcutta. It was very well run – orderly, neat, and clean. The food served there was excellent. And the staff members were well trained and were highly efficient. She realized that on the whole, the elderly people were much cared for and looked after in the best possible manner.

But, as she moved among those old people, she noticed that not a single one of them smiled. On the other hand, Mother found them all looking towards the door and looking out of the windows. Mother Teresa asked one of the nurses there, why this was so. And the nurse gently replied: “They are looking for someone to come and visit them. But no one ever comes!”. Yes! They had been so to say abandoned or disowned by their own families and friends and put away in this nursing home, under the pretext of offering them a better care.

And here, Mother Teresa would say that there is a worse form of poverty than material poverty. And that is to be 'lonely, unloved and unwanted'.

On last Sunday, we heard in the Gospel of Mark Chapter 6, verses 7 to 13, Jesus commissioning the apostles, 'sending them out two by two' that they might be on mission and in ministry. And today's Gospel has them returning from all of their endeavours, all of their works. They came back with great enthusiasm telling Jesus about the people that they had encountered, the opportunities that they had 'to heal the sick and to be with God's people'. And now, definitely they were tired and needed rest. And so in recognizing this, Jesus says, 'let us go away by ourselves, let us go off to a deserted place, and let us rest a while'. But it did not work out like that. The people saw Jesus and the apostles getting into the boat and they followed them because they were hungry and thirsty for truth, for love and for healing. And in fact, 'they hurried and reached the place before them'.

And does Jesus abandon them? No! Jesus knew that the scribes and the Pharisees had just rejected these ordinary people as hopeless. The elite class, the religious leaders of the society had written them off like those old people whom Mother Teresa met on her visit

to the nursing home in Calcutta. Now, in their hunger and thirst for God, for truth and for love, they flocked to Jesus. And the Gospel says that Jesus looked at them, saw their plight and had pity on them. The text affirms Jesus' extraordinary availability and His compassion for the needy. It teaches us that a Christian should be ready to sacrifice his time and even his rest in the service of the Gospel.

Now, in our life we definitely come across people in great need. And the question is: 'How do we respond to them? Do we turn our backs and walk away when we see those in need? Do we desert our own kith and kin when they become old, sick and depressed?'

Story is told of an old man who brought his phone to be repaired. The man at the shop had a careful look at the phone and then said to the old man: "Your phone is working fine". And then the old man looked at him and murmured or rather whispered to himself: "then why my kids don't call me anymore?"

Today, there are lots of people out there who are lonely, unloved and unwanted. There are lots of people in our world who are like sheep without a shepherd. And, they are waiting for us to lead them to Jesus the Good Shepherd.

It is easier to ‘pass by on the other side,’ and not pay heed to those whose needs are neglected or ignored. But Jesus our Lord and Master calls us today to be good shepherds to these very people we meet in our day to day life.

Let me conclude my homily with a little anecdote that I found in the book ‘One Minute Wisdom’ by Anthony De Mello, a Jesuit priest from India who died in 1987.

A writer arrived at the monastery to write a book about the Master. “People say you are a genius. Are you?” he asked. “You might say so,” said the Master with a smile. “And what makes one a genius?” asked the intrepid reporter. “The ability to see,” said the Master. The writer was betwixt and between. Scratching his hair with one hand and rubbing his tummy with the other, he muttered, “To see what?” The Master quietly replied, “The butterfly in a caterpillar, the eagle in an egg, the saint in a selfish person, life in death, unity in separation, the divine in the human and the human in the divine.”

According to Pope Francis, ‘To see, to have compassion and to teach’: The First and Second, ‘to see and to have compassion’ are always found together in the attitude of Jesus...He always gazes with ‘*the eyes of the heart*’.

These two verbs, 'to see and to have compassion', configure Jesus as the Good Shepherd. His compassion is not merely a human feeling but is the deep emotion of the Messiah in whom God's tenderness is made flesh.

Well dear friends, may we have 'the eyes to see'. And my prayer for you and me today is this that we may be able to go out from here to be the gentle shepherds that God's people need in today's world. God bless you all, **Amen.**