

# Opening the Word: Love of the shepherd

✘ There's a temptation for us fallen creatures to reduce the Church to a space of political gamesmanship. Vatican-watchers pay attention to the appointment of bishops, hypothesizing what this means for the pope's political vision of the Church. Individual clergy may wonder to themselves whether they will receive a more powerful appointment than their present one.

Such reduction of the Church to power politics should scare us. In Jeremiah, we hear about those who have been chosen to shepherd the kingdom of Judah. Instead of considering the gravity of their election by God, these evil shepherds "have scattered my sheep and driven them away" (Jer 23:2).

Happy to be part of God's elect, they take advantage of their situation, forgetting that they have been chosen not for their own good but, rather, to care for the People of God.

God will not leave these shepherds to their politicking. God will search for a new shepherd, a king, who "shall do what is just and right in the land" (Jer 23:5).

<a href="#"><u>16th Sunday in Ordinary Time – July 22, 2018</u></a>
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JER 23:1-6
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PS 23:1-3, 3-4, 5, 6
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EPH 2:13-18
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MK 6:30-34
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In the Gospel of Mark, we encounter this king, Jesus Christ. He is the king that does not court public power but escapes to a deserted place to rest with his disciples. Through prayer, he attends in love to the justice of his Father.

In the midst of this prayer, of this posture of reception, the

crowd notices Jesus. They leave the city and gather in the deserted place around the just king. He departs once more, but his heart is moved to mercy. He cannot leave these sheep alone “for they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things” (Mk 6:34).

Jesus reveals that if one is chosen as a shepherd, one should not expect comfort. Instead, God has elected the shepherd for the sake of service. For Jesus, being Son of the Father is not about power, but rather, obedient, self-giving love.

So too are those chosen as shepherds of the Church meant to serve in love. Our king has not established a reign of political violence where clergy climb to the top no matter the cost.

Jesus has been enthroned as the King of Peace. Through the peaceful kingdom made manifest in his very flesh, “we both have access in one Spirit to the Father” (Eph 2:18). We enter into the peace of God, of the self-giving love of the triune God.

It is this peace, rather than power politics that should be the political stance of those ordained for service.

God’s politics are made manifest on the cross rather than those of mere mortals.

To be a deacon, priest, bishop and, especially, the pope is thus no easy vocation. It is not about getting to wear the right clerical garb. It’s not about enacting one’s personal vision of the Church. To be chosen as a shepherd of God’s people is to risk scandal if one doesn’t learn from the peaceful reign of our king, Jesus.

How does a shepherd who wants to be faithful avoid this scandal? Instead of spending time in the midst of powerful professors and politicians, the just shepherd will devote himself to prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. The just

shepherd will live with poor men and women. He will be careful about his power, about using his position for politicking. He will be happy to shepherd the people he has been given by God.

The Church, if she is to redeem humankind, will need just shepherds who love peace rather than power.

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