

Serving Berlin's English-speaking Catholic Community since 1957



Catholic Community

Member of the English-Speaking Mission

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Our Mission Statement: The All Saints Catholic Community is a fully integrated, multicultural community with English as its unifying language. It is an open, warm, welcoming, inclusive community that prays together and celebrates its unity in diversity.

July 29, 2012, Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

2 Kings 4:42-44 • Psalm 145:10-11, 15-16, 17-18 • Ephesians 4:1-6 • Luke 7:16

What do good leaders look like?

When we look at the prophets of the Old Testament, of the First Testament, there is often the question of authority. Usually the prophet criticizes the civil or religious authorities of his time. The criticism is mainly about the abuse of power perpetrated by those exercising authority. When the prophets discover problems in their communities, they speak up. And this is then written down: "No problems; no Scripture." Our biblical books would be much thinner had there not been all these abuses of power and the prophets who protested against them.

In the course of his ministry, **Jeremiah** criticizes just about every authority figure in his country Israel 2600 years ago. Today's passage is classic - (Jeremiah 23:1-6), in my translation: *"How terrible it will be for the shepherds who lead my people down the wrong path!" announces the Lord. "You have scattered my sheep. You have driven them away. You have not taken good care of them."*

In ancient Israel it was the king who set the pattern for both civil and religious authority. That is why the prophet shares his dream of an ideal king. In the text: *"He will be a King who will rule wisely. He will do what is fair and right in the land. And this is the name they shall give him: "The Lord Who Makes Us Right with Himself" or "The Lord Makes Things Right for Us".*

"The Lord Makes Things Right for Us" This is a wordplay. In Hebrew it says: Zedekenuh Wnqed>c. And this is like the name Zedekiah hY"qid>c, the king of Judah at the time of Jeremiah. But Jeremiah is talking about a different king, about an ideal king, not about "his" ruling king.

The significance of justice and just individuals in our Bible is clear. The terms refer to those who not only have proper relationships with God, but also with one another. In this case, the leader who does *"what is just"* will treat people as Yahweh treats them, always gathering, never scattering.

The prophets consistently remind us how leaders accomplish this unity. They accomplish this unity, they gather not by falling back on rules and regulations. No, they put their relations with and commitments to others at the center of their lives. This is how they gather, how they accomplish unity. Jeremiah is convinced the only place his people can find such justice is in Yahweh; rarely, they find such justice in their civil and religious leaders.

We heard two other readings, from Paul and from Mark. They are our ancestors in the Christian faith. One thing is clear from the two readings: Paul and Mark also believed that such an emphasis on justice was at the heart of the prophetic reform of Judaism that Jesus wanted.

The writer of the letter to the community in **Ephesus** stresses the radical unity experienced by those who imitate Jesus' faith (Ephesians 2:17-18). Those "near" are Jews; those "far off," Gentiles, pagans, heathen. Before Jesus, a huge abyss existed between the two, between the Jews and the Gentiles. But now we read in the letter: *"At one time you were far away from God, but now in Christ Jesus, you are brought near to him. You are brought near to God through the sacrifice of Christ. Christ is the reason we are now at peace. He made us Jews and you who are not Jews one people. We were separated by a wall of hate that stood between us, but Christ broke down that wall. Christ ended the law with its many commands and rules. His purpose was to make the two groups become one in him. By doing this he would make peace. Through the cross Christ ended the hate between the two groups. And after they became one body, he wanted to bring them both back to God. He did this with his death on the cross."* This is the text of the letter to the community in Ephesus. So, if we want to follow Jesus, if we want to do what he did, then we only find reasons to unite, not to scatter.

Mark's Jesus conveys the same message in today's gospel (Mark 6:30-34). Returning from their first "missionary endeavor", the followers of Jesus are met by his invitation: *"Come with me. We will go to a quiet place to be alone. There we will get some rest."* But then, an unexpected crowd causes Jesus to change his plans and relate to more than just his friends: *"As Jesus stepped out of the boat, he saw a large crowd waiting. He felt sorry for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd to care for them. So he taught the people many things..."*

Unfortunately, our passage ends here – when you continue to read, then Mark goes on to have Jesus force his disciples to relate to others in need. They refuse to admit that something of theirs can take care of the crowd's hunger. But Jesus compels them to bring the little food they have found among them for his blessing. And when they begin to share what they have with others – only then do they also begin to imitate the justice of Jesus, his way of proceeding.

Jeremiah, Paul and Jesus in our readings present us their idea of a good leader. And for them a good leader has nothing to do with his or her faithfulness to rules, to regulations or to institutional traditions. The one thing that makes a good leader simply revolves around being faithful, true and near to one's people. Let us take some moments to ask ourselves how we experience leaders, are they good leaders? And are we good leaders, **i**n our families, with our colleagues, in our church community?

<http://www.dignityusa.org/breath/july-19-2009-sixteenth-sunday-year>

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