**THEME:** SHEPHERDS OF THE LORD’S FLOCK
**READINGS:** Jeremiah 23:1-6/ Ephesians 2:13-18/ Mark 6:30-34
16th Sunday in Ordinary Time

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The imagery of a shepherd is very important in the history of the Israelites. They saw a shepherd as someone who was courageous to ward off wild beasts and to fight armed robbers who sometimes attacked them. In addition, a shepherd was seen as a person who was vigilant over the flock and selflessly walked distances to ensure that the flock had something to eat. These were some of the qualities the Israelites expected of their leaders: courageous, selfless, vigilant, loving and caring. Moreover, they saw that these qualities were supremely modelled in their Divine Leader, and so they referred to him as ‘Shepherd’. This is evident in one of the very popular Psalms: ‘The Lord is my Shepherd’ (Psalm 23).

When the leaders God had chosen to shepherd his people had failed, his prophet Jeremiah proclaimed that the disappointing shepherds would be rejected and God would raise up new and faithful shepherds. Among the then future shepherds, a descendant of King David would stand out (*cf*. today’s first reading). Jesus Christ is the promised outstanding shepherd. Thus, he is referred to as the Good Shepherd (John 10:1-18).

Jesus as the Good Shepherd displays a lot of good qualities. Here, we shall mention five of them:

* **Fearless Courage**: Jesus knew what awaited him in Jerusalem, but in order to save us, he fearlessly went there, even in a public manner (Matt. 21:1-11).
* **Selfless Sacrifice**: Jesus says, ‘I am the Good Shepherd, I lay down my life for my sheep. … I lay down my life of my own accord’ (John 10:11, 18).
* **Patient Love**: Jesus patiently looks for the lost sheep (*cf*. Luke 15:1-7).
* **Caring Provider**: The caring quality of Jesus is evident in today’s gospel reading. For when he saw the great crowd, he perceived them as sheep without a shepherd, and so he had compassion on them. Immediately, he gave them the spiritual nourishment of the Word (Mark 6:33-34), and subsequently he gave them bodily nourishment.
* **Constant Vigilance**: Jesus constantly watches over us (John 6:37-39; 17:12).

Today, church leaders (bishops, priests, deacons, etc.) are the new shepherds God has raised up for his people. To avoid being rejected by God (*see last Sunday’s homily for some of the shepherds whom God rejects today*), church leaders should embrace and exhibit the above qualities of Jesus, the Good Shepherd:

* **Fearless Courage**: Every bishop/priest/deacon should proclaim the Word of God without fear or favour. In addition, he should courageously undertake new missions entrusted to him.
* **Selfless Sacrifice**: Besides the sacrifices inherent in the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience, the bishop/priest/deacon should embrace other sacrifices which his daily ministry may entail.
* **Patient Love**: With deep love for every soul entrusted to him, the bishop/priest/deacon should put in place a process by which the “lost sheep” of his diocese/parish/chaplaincy could be brought back to the Good Shepherd.
* **Caring Provider**: He should be compassionate in feeding the flock with the Word and Sacraments. In addition, he should ensure that the poor and needy receive material support.
* **Constant Vigilance**: He should be available to the flock, and constantly reflect on their (spiritual) needs, and pray for God’s provision of these needs.

Beloved, it should be clear that the life and task of a bishop/priest/deacon as a shepherd are very demanding. Let us, therefore, intensify our prayers for them, so that they will faithfully fulfill the mission entrusted to them and be eternally rewarded by Jesus, the Good and Chief Shepherd. Amen!