

Cycle B 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Sunday July 22nd 2018

Today we hear from the prophet Jeremiah, **“Woe to the shepherds who mislead and scatter the flock of my pasture says the Lord..... You have scattered my sheep and driven them away. You have not cared for them”**

Jeremiah’s vision of a shepherd is really about kings, and what the ideal king would be. The ideal king would watch out for the flock and protect it and keep it together. Often though, kings failed to do this. They failed to shepherd their people and instead misled them and scattered them.

In our time there is a new shepherd that is misleading and scattering the sheep. This new shepherd is an ideology that is being forced upon us as people of faith. I am talking about **SECULARISM**. According to Webster’s Dictionary secularism is: **A system of doctrines and practices that disregards or rejects any form of religious faith and worship. The belief that religion and ecclesiastical affairs should not enter into the function of the state especially in public education.**

This past week a new restaurant in Cheviot made national news. The owner made a business decision; since there are 7 churches within a mile of his establishment. He offered a 10% discount to any customer on Sunday that brought in a church bulletin. A group called Freedom From Religion Foundation,

threatened legal action against the restaurant. The group is part of the Secular Coalition of America. They saw the actions of the restaurant as discriminating against non-religious. The restaurant has since changed its policy. Well, we need to start pushing back against this empty ideology. The secularists are succeeding in erasing religious expression from culture and society. Likely the moral code which religion brings, is an obstacle for them. We can quickly name some of the secularist negative influences. Two thirds of Ireland just voted to make abortion legal by repealing a constitutional amendment that protected the unborn. The redefining of marriage, the confusion regarding gender in young people, and the destruction of family life; are all casualties of secularism. Once again we need to push back against this empty ideology.

Today's Gospel passage can shed light on our current situation. The Apostles just came back from their missionary journey, and Jesus invited them to, **“Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.”** The rest did not take place as we hear, **“People saw them leaving and many came to know about it. They hastened there on foot from all the towns and arrived at the place before them.”** This tells us something very important that is applicable for us today. The people were searching for Jesus. They knew of His teaching and healing; they had a hunger for something more. In our time many people are searching for something. They do not know what they are searching for and they

are searching in all of the wrong places. Jesus recognized this in this Gospel event. As we heard, **“When He disembarked and saw the vast crowd, His heart was moved with pity for them, for they were like sheep without a shepherd, and He began to teach them many things.”** Jesus knew that the people were searching for something more. More than what this world has to offer. Jesus is the True Shepherd that knows His flock and His flock knows Him. Secularism is a wolf in sheep’s clothing. The True Shepherd is Jesus Christ.

What does Jesus and His Church offer that secularism can never offer. All we need to do is listen to the words of St Paul. **“He came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near, for through Him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.”** The peace that St. Paul is speaking of calls us to look forward to the peace of heaven with the Triune God. For us as Christians we live in hope that there is something more than this world. We know we are made for more. The secularists only live for this world, and do not know the peace of Christ that we know.

Jeremiah pointed out the shepherds who mislead the Lord’s flock. Today there is a shepherd that is misleading the people of God and it is called secularism. People are searching for something, but they are searching in all of the wrong places. We know that the answer to secularism is the Peace of the True Shepherd Jesus Christ.

