



June 18, 2023

11th Sunday of Ordinary Time

At the sight of the crowds, Jesus' heart was moved with pity for them...

Matthew 9:36



Dear Friends,

A bishop on the East Coast came out of his cathedral one day. He saw a small boy playing in the mud in the empty lot next door. The bishop went over and asked the boy what he was doing with the mud. *"I'm making a cathedral,"* he said. *"Well,"* said the bishop, *"if you have a cathedral, you must have a bishop."* *"Nah,"* said the boy, *"I ain't got enough muck to make a bishop."* How do we view authority? Do we agree with the boy or are the bishops getting a bad rap?

Every organization needs authority, or it will descend into chaos. But there are different styles in the exercise of authority. Authority can be self-serving (and ultimately destructive of an organization) or authority can be exercised as a service to others. Do you remember when we used to refer to people in public office as public servants? In today's passage from Matthew, Jesus is moved with compassion for the people because they have leaders who are not public servants.

Jesus wants to tend them like a good shepherd. A good shepherd stays with the flock and anticipates their needs. A good shepherd, as Pope Francis has reminded bishops and priests, *"smells like the sheep."* In other words, a leader who acts like a good shepherd is bonded with the people. A good leader is not cold, detached, arrogant or superior. A good shepherd has empathy. He does not use only a prod but uses compassion to urge the flock onward.

Jesus has a problem with the leaders of his day. They have taken care of themselves, they have amassed fortunes, and built themselves villas. They live in comfort while the majority live at a subsistence level. They are self-serving not public servants. They have forgotten the Covenant with God. You were once nobodies; God has taken you from obscurity and made you *"dearer to [God] than all other people..."* (Exodus 19:5) Care for the marginalized will always be a sign of faithfulness to God.

The reason that Jesus appoints a special group of twelve is a prophetic sign. He wants to reestablish the Israelite religion founded upon the twelve tribes and he believes to have been corrupted. This is why he tells them don't go to non-Jewish areas. The first order of business is to gather back those who had been lost over time by bad shepherding. The job of the shepherd is to gather the flock together, not scatter them.

Recently, several Catholic bishops have been quickly writing policies concerning the treatment of transgender people. The U.S. Bishops' Committee on Doctrine recently issued a statement that seeks to stop Catholic Healthcare institutions from providing gender-affirming care. We still have many bishops who would rather start a fight than take time to understand or walk compassionately with others.

M. Therese Lysaught, a bioethicist and theologian, recently wrote a criticism of the bishops' statement in the National Catholic Reporter. She observed that the bishops have failed to follow the standards that Pope Francis has set for moral theologians in the modern world. Pope encourages pastors and teachers to listen, to be respectful, and to engage other disciplines like biology, psychology, and sociology.

The pope reminds us it takes time to listen to *"the real dramas lived by people who often find themselves confused in the face of moral dilemmas of life."* Hasty statements serve no one. Pastors and teachers who do not take the time to listen offer only *"cold morality, theoretical morality."* Our hope is that the bishops would heed the example of Pope Francis and take time to dialogue and listen. Let us pray for our bishops to have the compassion of Jesus.

Peace,

Fr Ron

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