

4. February 2023

## Sheep without a shepherd

Mk 6, 30-34

*The apostles rejoined Jesus and told him all they had done and taught. And he said to them, 'Come away to some lonely place all by yourselves and rest for a while'; for there were so many coming and going that there was no time for them even to eat. So they went off in the boat to a lonely place where they could be by themselves. But people saw them going, and many recognised them; and from every town they all hurried to the place on foot and reached it before them. So as he stepped ashore he saw a large crowd; and he took pity on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he set himself to teach them at some length.*

This Gospel passage gives us a glimpse into the heart of our Lord.... The first thing it shows us is the intimate relationship between Jesus and His disciples. Evidently they were exhausted by the mission, for there were so many people arriving that they did not even have time to eat, so immersed were they in their service.

Anyone who has dealt with large groups of people on a mission can imagine how tired the disciples must have been, for to minister to many people in need of help requires all your energy. One is constantly in service, and all one's inner strength is required.

This is how the disciples were feeling. The Lord noticed this and wanted to give them a moment of quiet and rest, so that they could renew their physical and spiritual strength, and to give them the opportunity to be alone with Him.

We can see how gently Jesus treats His disciples, knowing exactly what they need - a look of love and deep understanding!

But it didn't happen like that: the crowd was looking for Jesus and many people arrived even before Jesus and His disciples at the place where they were going to be alone.

And here again we have a glimpse into the heart of the Lord, who had pity on the needs of the people. He saw them as sheep without a shepherd. This is a serious situation for the sheep. An unguided flock is lost and defenceless if the wolf comes. And in this case, what is true for the animal kingdom is also true for people. People need a real guide!

The people who sought Jesus must have felt that the religious leaders of their time were not true shepherds for them. As Scripture denounces, they often shepherded themselves (cf. Ez 34:2)... Consequently, the people were in a difficult situation, which could lead them to great inner anguish. Let us remember how the people of Israel lamented when there were no prophets and no one to guide them (cf. Dan 3:38).

Jesus sees this inner need: He is the Good Shepherd, who lays down His life for His sheep (Jn 10:11). Therefore, forgetting His own weariness and exhaustion, He takes pity on them. People need Him: they need His guidance, they need His salvation, they need His love and closeness.

This has not changed in our time, even if people are apparently more autonomous and emancipated. But how much confusion reigns in today's society! People run after false ideologies and money; they chase after wrong illusions of happiness.... They have no shepherds to follow and often do not know where they belong.

Unfortunately, a great confusion has also arisen in the Church, and we find only few pastors who point it out, who oppose it and give clear guidelines to the faithful. Some do not even perceive this confusion and, in the worst case, even identify it with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

That is why it is all the more important to seek Jesus, to tell Him that we need Him and to listen to His voice in the midst of so much clamour. He has spoken His Word and has left us in the Church a clear doctrine and Magisterium. If we listen to His Word and the authentic voice of the Church, we will have the guidance we need.

The spiritual need of mankind is even deeper than the material need. Deliverance from sin and confusion outweighs anything else. Men are in need of a clear

proclamation and a good example. They must learn what grace and sin are, what brings them nearer to God and what drives them away from Him....

And Jesus "*began to teach them many things*" - today's Gospel concludes.... Their souls were dry and His word gave them strength and nourishment. Let us too be ready to bear witness, allowing ourselves to be filled with the love of Jesus and to look with compassion on those who have no shepherd and do not yet know the Lord!