

Homily.16OrdB.7.18.21
St. Bernard Church
Deacon Tim Sullivan

CONFUSION AND THE SHEPHERDS

Today's readings bring up an awkward subject for what is going on in the Church these days. The readings focus on the role of shepherds, those who have leadership positions in the Church.

The subject is awkward because, as most of you know, there is a lot of confusion and division in the leadership of the Church today. It's especially awkward for those who have a deep love for the Church.

Some of the prophecies in the Bible, from our Blessed Mother and from leaders in the Church, have come true.

In Garabandal, Spain, on June 18, 1965, Mary delivered the following message:

"Many cardinals, many bishops and many priests are on the road to perdition and are taking many souls with them. Less and Less importance is being given to the Eucharist."

In Akita, Japan, on October 13, 1973, Mary warned of the dangers threatening the Church in these words:

"The work of the devil will infiltrate even into the Church in such a way that one will see cardinals opposing cardinals, bishops against bishops...the Church will be full of those who accept compromises and the demon will press many priests and consecrated souls to leave the service of the Lord."

In 1977, Pope St. Paul VI said:

"The tail of the devil is functioning in the disintegration of the Catholic world. The darkness of Satan has entered and spread throughout the Catholic Church even to its summit. Apostasy, loss of faith, is spreading throughout the world and into its highest levels in the Church."

In today's First Reading from the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, we have this passage:

Woe to the shepherds who mislead and scatter the flock of my pasture, says the LORD. Therefore, thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, against the shepherds who shepherd my people: You have scattered my sheep and driven them away. You have not cared for them, but I will take care to punish

your evil deeds. I myself will gather the remnant of my flock from all the lands to which I have driven them and bring them back to their meadow; there they shall increase and multiply. I will appoint shepherds for them who will shepherd them so that they need no longer fear and tremble; and none shall be missing, says the LORD.

Today, we have cardinals, bishops, priests and even the Pope who take ambiguous and misleading positions on issues such as who can receive Holy Communion, can Catholic married couples use contraception, can homosexual acts be morally acceptable. Have Catholic clergy, even at the highest levels in the Church, covered up sexual abuse and active homosexuality in the priesthood? There are financial scandals at the Vatican involving prominent cardinals, one of whom has recently been indicted.

One of the primary functions of shepherds in the Church is to warn the flock, warn the faithful, of existing threats to their spiritual well-being and to the Church. We have elements in the Church who are advocating for the acceptance of behaviors that clearly violate the long-standing moral principles of the Church, yet very little is said publicly by our shepherds.

For example, today there are approximately 80 Catholic members of Congress and at least 12 Catholic senators who consistently vote in favor of abortion rights. This has been a scandal for decades, which is now made worse by an aggressively pro-abortion President who identifies as Catholic. And the scandal is compounded by the silence of so many bishops and disagreement among the bishops about what to do concerning pro-abortion Catholic politicians.

As a footnote, I am pleased to say that just this past Friday, our Bishop Konderla released his statement affirming very clearly that a Catholic politician who supports abortion rights should not receive Communion.

Pope Saint Gregory the Great had some great advice in his rules for pastoral care. Here is what he wrote:

The ruler should be discreet in keeping silence ...in speech, lest he utter what should be kept secret, or keep secret what should be uttered. For just as incautious speech leads men into error, so, too, untimely silence leaves in error those who might have been instructed. Often, indeed, imprudent rulers, being afraid of losing human favor, fear to speak freely of what is right, and, in the words of the truth, do not exercise the zeal of shepherds caring for the flock, but serve the role of mercenaries; for when the wolf appears, they flee and hide themselves in silence. Wherefore, the Lord reproves them through the prophet Isaiah, saying: They are all guard dogs, but not able to bark.

Now I know for most of us, what happens with the larger Church may not have much impact on our own lives as Catholics. We can pray, go to Mass at our parish, and not think too much about some of the problems I have mentioned. And maybe we don't worry about what's going on in the universal Church because Jesus told us that the Church will always prevail.

The problem is that we are losing souls. The Church is losing the souls of those who are confused and misled, of those who leave the Church and of those who would join the Church but for the confusion and scandals.

Some of you may be familiar with Bishop Fulton Sheen. He had a long-running, popular tv show in which he explained the beliefs of the Catholic Church. In 1948, Bishop Sheen prophesied that Satan would establish a fake Church which would mimic the Catholic Church, that would resemble the Catholic Church but be emptied of its divine content.

Bishop Sheen concluded his prophetic words, and, again, this is in 1948, with this advice:

“Who's going to save our Church? It's not our bishops, it's not our priests and it is not the religious. It is up to you, the people. You have the minds, the eyes and the ears to save the Church. Your mission is to see that the priests act like priests, your bishops act like bishops, and the religious act like religious.”

What Bishop Sheen is saying is that lay people in the Church can no longer assume that everything our Church leaders do is good and trustworthy. It's your job to hold the clergy accountable. And if you don't do that job, the Church suffers.

So pray hard for the Church and be attentive. Keep up with what is going on in the Church. Read. Listen to Catholic radio. The best website for monitoring what's going on in the Catholic Church, including the many good things, is bigpulpit.com.

Ask questions. Write letters. Send emails. Encourage local Church leaders to publicly address issues and developments that arise.

As Bishop Sheen recommends, use your minds, your eyes and ears to save the Church. God wants to use you to help Him protect, purify and renew the Church.