

Catechumenate Session

APPRENTICES IN FAITH: A Resource for the RCIA
Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time • Year B • July 21, 2024



*Lord,
you create us in love,
you save and redeem us
by that same love,
and you sustain your people
with grace upon grace
all because of the same
everlasting love.
Raise up for us
pastoral leaders
worthy of that love.*

Sunday Word

Jeremiah 23:1-6
Psalm 23:1-6
Ephesians 2:13-18
Mark 6:30-34

Shepherds for God's People

The prophet Jeremiah conveys God's message to the leaders of his people: they have misled and scattered his flock! Those evil leaders will be punished and God will raise up shepherds who will care for the people. They shall dwell securely.

Access in One Spirit

All those who were far from God will be brought close by the Blood of Christ. The loving self-sacrifice of Jesus provides us access to God in the Holy Spirit.

Pity Over Their Plight

The Twelve accomplish the mission given them by Jesus. They return to him exhausted. Even as they try to recuperate privately, the people find them because their need is so great. Jesus' heart is moved with compassion. He teaches them, for they are as aimless as sheep that have no shepherd.

Church Teaching: Pastoral Ministry in the Church

Gospel Backdrop

In Mark's Gospel, the disciples are usually described as obtuse. They almost always misinterpret or are too dense to get what Jesus is saying. This time, however, they get it right. They succeed in the mission Jesus assigns to them. That is why they are so favorably described by Mark this Sunday. At the start of this Gospel episode, the Twelve are called Apostles.

The new title signifies a new relationship with Jesus. It is significant that Mark says they returned from the mission detailing "all they had done and taught" (Mark 6:30). Like Jesus ("he began to teach," verse 34), the Apostles are to be both doers and teachers once the Shepherd has been taken from them. Here we have the first report of their success in that regard.

Bishops as Successors

In the Church, the entire college of bishops—in union with the pope—are the successors to the first Apostles. The Apostles continued the work of the Shepherd, Jesus Christ. So, too, the bishops have been entrusted with continuing the work of the Apostles.

All the faithful are called to help the bishops engage in pastoral ministry. This ministry takes place within the Church, directed for the benefit of her own members, the flock of Christ. Since, however, all people are offered Salvation and therefore are ultimately cared for by the Church, the “flock” encompasses more than those who are full members of the household of the faithful. Any activity by the Church that seeks to care for others’ needs can therefore be described as a form of pastoral ministry.

Types of Pastoral Ministry

There are four major spheres of contemporary pastoral ministry. First, this term indicates any activity that attempts to proclaim the Good News of Salvation embodied in the words and deeds of Jesus Christ. Second, it also stands for any public prayer of assembled believers, whether that is the celebration of the sacraments, the Liturgy of the Hours, or a locally created prayer service. Third, it also denotes any activity that promotes or assists the building up of the household of the faithful—from administrative acts of the Church to local parish parties. Fourth, it indicates all those actions that serve the needs of individuals, such as marriage counseling, the operation of food pantries, rent assistance, disaster aid, or any other like endeavor.

Each of these spheres may blend one into the other. For example, any service activity is, because of its motivation, another form of proclamation of the Good News. Again, any pure communication of the Gospel message is another form of service on behalf of broken, hurting, and sinful people in need of God’s grace.

Distinctiveness of Church Teaching

The term “pastoral ministry” is very broad and therefore casts a wide net. How can it be otherwise? Seen from the recipient’s viewpoint, every area of life and activity within the Church herself or in the wider world is potentially the object of pastoral ministry. The need is great. God’s people need shepherds. God abundantly bestows his grace upon the chief shepherds of the Church, the bishops and their co-workers—priests, deacons, religious, and the laity. That is the only reason the tasks involved in pastoral ministry can be envisioned as not overwhelming.

Key Terms

APOSTLES

First followers designated by Jesus to be his chosen witnesses and the foundation of the Church (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 857).

COLLEGE OF BISHOPS

This denotes all the bishops together in union with the pope, who succeed the “college” of the Twelve Apostles with Peter as their head (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 862).

LITURGY OF THE HOURS

Official prayer of the Church by which the day is divided up into certain “hours,” e.g., “Morning Prayer” or “Evening Prayer,” so that they might be prayed (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1174).

Voices of Faith

For the sake of his sheep the Shepherd met the death, which was threatening them. He did this that, by a new arrangement, He might, although captured Himself, capture the Devil, the author of death; that, although slain Himself, He might punish; that, by dying for His sheep, He might open the way for them to conquer death.

—Saint Peter Chrysologus

Love is not dependence but a gift that makes us live.

—Pope Benedict XVI

Further Reading

Catechism of the Catholic Church: 852 (Church walks the same missionary road as Christ), 861 (bishops successors to Apostles), 863 (apostolate), 899 (laity as “front line” of Church life)

United States Catholic Catechism for Adults: Chapter 34 (The Tenth Commandment: Embrace Poverty of Spirit), especially the section entitled “I Want to Live and Die for God,” pages 447–448

Compendium—Catechism of the Catholic Church: 183 (college of bishops), 188 (vocation of lay faithful), 191 (laity and service)

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