

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Damned Shepherds

Who are the unfortunate shepherds who are “doomed” in Jeremiah’s prophecy today? They are the kings of Israel, and Jeremiah was the prophet who watched them collapse before the pagan empire from the North, which exterminated the last of them. It was only bearable if Jeremiah could hold on to some kind of hope; and his hope was that in God’s providence it might be possible to raise up an heir for David. Jeremiah could not see how it would happen, but nor could he forget that God had promised David, *Your House will stand for ever in my sight*.

Pity For The Flock

Jeremiah’s voice today is doom-laden; the kings deserve nothing from God, being for the most part greedy and self-seeking. We know many corrupt heads of government in our own day, shamelessly demanding their personal helicopters while their people die of thirst and cholera. Kings in Jerusalem watched the political tides, instead of looking for God, trying to corner markets and force concessions from neighbouring countries, as if they were just another state; whereas the prophets thought of them as under the care of God, free from the fear of other nations, and of the need to play politics. The common people were as ever the sufferers, and as Jesus looks out on the crowds today he feels moved with pity for their poverty, and their need of care.

Whose Job Is It?

In their recent campaign, Messrs Bush & Blair (Removals) Inc did a swift and, some think, very expensive job of deposing one of these “shepherds”. They are now having to prove the purity of their motives. The world asks by what right they “police” the earth, and on what principles; no-one has found the massively threatening hardware we were told was trained upon us. I guess that a Jewish prophet might have been on hand, in a situation like this, to announce the decree of the Lord; how convenient, you may think, compared to the agony of choice facing leaders like ours! But what does the prophet promise from God? First, that unworthy kings will be dispossessed; secondly, that God will raise up a worthy shepherd for in their place.

The Good Shepherd

When we come to the Gospel, we find that Jesus is looking out on the crowds as a good shepherd might. He seeks to understand their plight, in order to lead them to safety and peace. What should we learn from him, as he is clearly “interpreting the Scriptures” for us by his attitude and teaching? Firstly, see how he doesn’t waste time trying to avoid his responsibility – as we frequently do, having grown up in a culture of *Nowt to do wi’ me, mate*. If we can find a way to pass the buck, we do; it is almost an instinctive self-protection to look for someone else to carry the can. Secondly, he is ready to abandon what he was doing with instant effect; the needed holiday had already cost some effort – packing five loaves and two fishes, getting hold of a boat, sailing it to a quiet place; yet it’s instantly abandoned in favour of more of what made it so necessary. The silence of the Gospel about the disciples’ response is eloquent. One imagines they were at best a grudging element in the audience, as Jesus once more *set himself to teach them at some length!*

God’s Comprehensive Wisdom

If you look at the psalm today, you will see the resolution of the Gospel. The Shepherd leads us *out of valleys of darkness into the place of repose and plenty*; in other words, what Jesus did for the crowd is exactly what he had wanted to do for the disciples. We should never assume that the tumult that seems to overtake our plan for peace is not, at last, the fastest way to it. God is a Saviour, and allows nothing of value to be lost. Every day we must trust him. *Fr Philip*