

*Now many (the crowd) saw them going (Jesus and the disciples) and recognized them, and they ran there on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things. Mark 6: 33-34*



With the year coming to an end and Advent bringing us to Christmas, there still seems like there is so much to be done, especially since the enforced separation of Covid. The signs of fatigue can happen. While there is much contentment at having jobs completed well, there is the associated tiredness. With regular demands still present it can be tempting to shut off from the needs of others. In the Gospel written by Mark at the start of the story known as the feeding of the five thousand we see just such an experience. Mark tells us that the apostles after their experience of going out and sharing with others about the kingdom of God they have returned content but also tired. Jesus, filled with understanding, wants to give them some relief; and so he takes them away to a quiet place (deserted) where they can rest for a while, and recover. But the passage then tells us 'that many (a crowd) saw them going and knew... and got there ahead of them'.

No one would have blamed Jesus and the disciples for being frustrated, but what we see in this passage is that the writer Mark offers to us the image of Jesus of singular intensity. It is an image of one really seeing the crowd with his eyes and also gathering the sentiments of his heart. Mark tells us that as Jesus landed he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things.

There are three verbs in this evocative picture: to see, to have compassion and to teach. These are what we can say are the verbs of the Shepherd.

The first and second verbs, to see and have compassion are found together in the attitude of Jesus. His gaze is not that of an inquisitive investigator or an uninterested recorder. He always gazes with the 'eyes of the heart', he truly sees them as he truly sees us. The two verbs, to see and to have compassion, configure Jesus as the Good Shepherd. In this image we get a glimpse that his compassion too is not merely a human feeling but is the deep emotion of the Messiah in whom God's tenderness is made flesh.

From this tenderness is born Jesus' wish to nourish the crowd with the bread of his word, that is to teach the word of God to the people. Jesus sees us, Jesus has compassion on us and Jesus teaches us. It is this word that calls us to come alongside and find our true rest in Him.

Wherever you are now, know that there is one who truly sees you as you are, and he is waiting to welcome you.

De colores!