

The First Reading today is taken from the Old Testament book of Jeremiah.. Jeremiah decried the crisis of leadership in his country. Both civic and religious leaders had failed their nation. State and Church were corrupt and evil.

As a result, Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed, resulting in the deaths of many of Jerusalem's inhabitants, and the exile of most of the rest of the populace.

That is the context of the prophecy of Jeremiah who said, "Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!"

Because of the care that shepherds took with their sheep, shepherds became a metaphor for leaders, such as kings, priests, and prophets. Good shepherds cared for their sheep. They fed and watered them. They guided and protected them.

Two important truths stand out in this passage: Both State and Church were corrupt and evil. Secondly, the people were as much to blame as their leaders.

They blindly followed these wicked kings and wayward priests instead of listening to faithful prophets that God had placed in their midst. The people did this because they benefitted from the governance of their evil leaders.

But I think the most important aspect of Jeremiah's prophecy is not the condemnation of the shepherd, but that God would be merciful.

In the midst of destruction and suffering, God says: "I will gather the remnant of My flock out of all countries where I have driven them, and bring them back to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase. In short, Jeremiah says, if you remain faithful, God will save you.

The prophet stated: God will give them Good shepherds who will govern wisely, which means they will govern them from the perspective of eternity or from the perspective of God himself.

God will give them shepherds who will govern with justice and right. To govern with justice is to govern from the heart of God. Human justice is very different from Divine Justice.

If God were to deal with us according to our sense of justice or fairness, we would be completely destroyed because we are not faithful. Divine Justice or Biblical Justice stems from the heart of God. It means governing with compassion.

In the Gospel, Jesus models good governance or leadership for his disciples.

Faced with a large crowd, the Gospel says Jesus was moved with compassion for them for he said they were like sheep without a shepherd. And Jesus addressed himself to teaching them many things.

The catchword in both readings is shepherd- a metaphor for caring, providing, protecting and more especially bringing back the stray, leaving the 99 on the hillside and going in search of the one that has strayed or is lost.

I ask you and myself: Is it possible for us to have good governance without compassion? Or can you be a good Christian without empathy?

In the context of our sisters and brothers at the border, some of you have told me that you wanted to do the right thing; that you struggle between being right and being kind.

It is the same thing when it comes to homelessness or any other challenges that we face today - Our struggle between being right and being kind. If I am kind, am I enabling bad behavior or am I aiding dependence and laziness?

I want to say, if you have to make choice between being right and being kind, chose being kind. And you wont go wrong.

Faced with the same struggle, Jesus chose to be kind instead of being right as with the woman caught in adultery, where the Mosaic law said such persons should be condemned or the woman at the well, whom he treated with respect and love. This is true in every divine encounter.

Why because God governs from the heart. Divine Justice means governing with compassion.

I was at St. Mary's in Walnut Creek for 8 years and one story has stood out for me.

A calm and quiet day at the school one morning all of a sudden erupted into chaos and commotion. Our school children were having their recess.

A stranger had stumbled into our Church and school campus. He looked very disoriented and confused. He was walking around rather suspiciously. He was looking for something.

Multiple parents called me asking what do we do? Our Vice Principal and the 8th grade teacher walked over to the man and asked him if she could help him in any way. And he said, "Yes."

He said He was hungry; that he had not eaten for 3 days. Without a second thought she took him to our conference room, made him feel at home and gave him, I believe, her own lunch as we had no cafeteria there. She sat patiently with him listening to his story and it was a tragic story. There were tears on both sides.

He was released from prison and he had nowhere to go. After what I call a Divine encounter, she walked with him until he left our campus. What a beautiful example to our children. This teacher chose to be kind rather than being right.

Some of us can be judgmental, others are sympathetic to people's pain, but today God calls us to action. Today I would like to leave you with a couple of questions.

When I came to this country 20 years ago, I got a doctoral degree in education from USF, which was known as EdD. I was very proud of my EdD until I found another full form: Empathy Deficiency Disorder. Are we as a nation or a world or a Church suffering from EDD?

Wherever you are, at home, at church, in the Office, do you lead from the Heart? Does your sense of Justice resemble that of Divine justice? Does your justice stem from the heart?

Do you often chose being kind over being right?

In our world, there is so much room for kindness, compassion and empathy. And that is our prayer.