

Being a Learner Fourth Week in Ordinary Time Saturday, February 3, 2018 8:15 AM
1 Kgs 3:4-13; **Mk 6:30-34** (St. Blaise, bishop and martyr; St. Ansgar, bishop; BVM) (It is precisely the disciples that are being formed and trained in helping people to find their purpose.)

“And he began to teach them many things.”

So this is a story of **Jesus overworked** with his disciples—there is/are twelve—overworked, not even having time to eat, and yet **when he confronts this mass of people, he has pity on them.** Now sometimes the word pity is derided today, as if it’s something unworthy. It is not unworthy. Some people think to have pity is to be superior. Well it depends on how you understand it. Actually **pity is realizing people’s neediness.** That’s what it actually means, to recognize, to realize people’s neediness. It does not require that you be needy to observe other people’s neediness, but is this superiority? It is in the minds of some. I would say not however in the mind of **Mark the evangelist. He wasn’t trying to say Jesus felt superior to the people but, rather, that he saw their great need.**

But now this is the interesting thing, **he begins to teach them.** They are **“like sheep without a shepherd.”** Well sheep without a shepherd would be scattered, maybe they would be hungry, but **they will surely be in disorder and loss actually, since sheep are wanderers.** They tend just to move, and so without a shepherd they would be lost.

Now his observation of **what they need is teaching.** This is something modern people often don’t see, that **we need to learn. The world** and all its information is not enough. The world is remarkable, exciting, intriguing, challenging, engaging, but not enough. It **doesn’t contain within itself a reason for living.** It presupposes a reason. It presupposes a purpose, but it doesn’t give one. But what if we don’t have a reason? Evidently in the world today many do not. What if we

don't have a purpose? Clearly some of the so-called "brightest lights" in our culture do not have a purpose.

I remember a book written by a great physicist called *The First Three Minutes*, about the origin of the universe. It is a brilliant book; I highly recommend it—*The First Three Minutes*, talking about **how the Big Bang banged**, so to speak, **in terms of a physicist**. But then he is talking **at** *about* the end of the book: he is on the plane, and the plane is getting ready to land, and he's thinking about this book and all that is in it, and he says it's a shame that all this is for nothing. **He was personally an atheist and he could see no point in anything**. This is a sheep without a shepherd. **This is what it means to wander**.

And it is precisely **the disciples that are being formed and trained in helping people to find their purpose**, to find meaning in life, which the world will not give them, cannot give them. And this is a very exciting adventure itself, equal to any or even surpassing. **And it is a gift given to everyone who answers the call of Jesus to follow him. And it begins with learning, i.e., being a disciple, a learner**. We all need that.