

“They were like sheep without a shepherd.”

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Once upon a time, one name stood out above all others in the Civil Rights Movement of the 50’s & 60’s. That name was, of course, “Martin Luther King, Jr.”

King was the undisputed leader of millions of black Americans. He was their hero. He was their leader. He was their shepherd. Without him, black people in those years would’ve been like the people in today’s Gospel, which I just read to you from St. Mark. They would have been like sheep without a shepherd.

King and his close associates were like Jesus and his disciples in a certain way. They, too, found it impossible to go off alone by themselves for some peace and quiet, for some rest.

For example, one night in Montgomery, Alabama, King had just gone to bed. His wife, Coretta, had already fallen asleep. Just as he was about to doze off, the telephone rang. He quickly picked it up in an effort not to wake up Coretta.

An angry voice on the other end said,

**“Listen, Nigger, we’ve taken all we want from you.
Before next week, you’ll be sorry you ever came to Montgomery.”**

Suddenly, all of King’s fears came tumbling down on him. All his courage deserted him. He got up, went to the kitchen, and made a pot of coffee. He sat down and tried to think of a way he could remove himself from the situation in Montgomery without appearing to be a coward.

At that moment, with his courage gone, he bowed his head and prayed to God. He said:

“Lord, I’m taking a stand for what I think is right. But, now, I am afraid, terribly afraid. People are looking to me to lead them. BUT (& there’s that proverbial ‘BUT’ in life, my friends), if I appear to be frightened, they, too, will become afraid. I am at the end of my rope. I don’t know what to do. I can no longer face this responsibility alone.”

The most striking lines in Dr. King’s prayer are the ones where he says:

**“People are looking to me to lead them. BUT...
if I appear to be frightened, they too, will become afraid.”**

In other words, to borrow from today’s Gospel: **“They will be like sheep without a shepherd.”**

Now, step back and look at this: Every pastor of every parish...

Every teacher of every class...

Every parent of every family...

Among many others...

can identify with Dr. King’s words!

As you well know, **there are times in our life when we feel** the weight of our responsibility in a frightening way. **There are times in our life when we feel** we can no longer carry the burden placed upon us. **There are times in our life when we feel** like Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane when he cried out in desperation:

“Father, let this cup pass from me.” Mt.26:39

**‘When times of crisis like this come, what should we do?’ you ask.
Well—I am glad you asked that question!**

We should do what Jesus did. We should do what Martin Luther King did.

We should do what Christians have always done.

We should turn to God!

Shortly before the Battle of Gettysburg, President Lincoln felt crushed by the weight of responsibility on his shoulders. Instinctively, he turned to God in prayer.

Commenting on that prayer, Lincoln said:

**“Never before had I prayed with such earnestness. I wish I could repeat my prayer.
I felt I must put all my trust in Almighty God... I had done all I could.
He alone could save the nation from destruction.”**

When Lincoln rose from his knees, he said:

“I felt my prayer had been answered... I had no misgiving about the result.”

Harry Truman told reporters after his first full day as president:

**“Boys, if you ever pray, pray for me now. I don’t know if you fellows ever had a load of hay
fall on you, BUT... when they told me yesterday what had happened,
I felt like the moon, the stars, and the planets had fallen on me.”**

Jesus Christ, Abraham Lincoln, Harry Truman, Martin Luther King—all four of these shepherds did the same thing when responsibility crushed them. They turned to God...in prayer.

In each case, God gave them the courage and strength to continue to shepherd their people.

There is a practical message here for each one of us. It is simply this:

When heavy burdens threaten to crush us **and** we’ve done all we could, we too should turn to God in prayer. If we do, God will strengthen **us**, just as he strengthened these shepherds!

I now close paraphrasing today’s responsorial psalm:

**“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He guides me in right paths for his name’s sake.
Though I walk in the valley of darkness, I will not fear.
Though I be crushed by heavy burdens, I will not fear.
For the Lord walks beside me.
He steadies me and strengthens me.
And when life fades, like the fading sunset,
He will escort me into his home...
to live with him... forever and ever.”**

May Almighty God, our loving Abba, bless you...
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.