

Misericordia Domini, A ✕ D 2010
John 10:11-16

Adapted from a sermon by Pr. H. R. Curtis

In the Name of the Father and of the ✕ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

1 God is our Father. He is the only true and real Father – the only one who is everything a father is supposed to be. We don't call God "Father" because He is like our earthly fathers; rather we call our earthly fathers "father" because they are called to imitate and serve the real Father. Yet you certainly know stories of earthly fathers who have been nothing like your Heavenly Father and lived lives that do not measure up to that holy title. Even excellent earthly fathers cannot live up to that title all the time, because no one is born free of sin.

2 Similarly, today Jesus tells you that He is the Good Shepherd. The Latin word for shepherd is pastor. There is only one real and true Pastor – Jesus. He is the only one who is everything a pastor is supposed to be. We don't call Jesus the "Pastor and Bishop" of our souls, as St. Peter today says, because Jesus is like our earthly pastors – rather we call our earthly pastors "Pastor" because they are called to imitate and serve the real Pastor and stand in His stead doing His work. And, of course, earthly pastors fail just as earthly fathers fail. So what makes for a good pastor? What did Jesus say: "I am the good shepherd, the good pastor, who lays down his life for the sheep; who doesn't run away when the wolf comes but steps in the breach between the wolf and my sheep."

3 But the wolf is scary. The wolf represents the enemies of God's lambs, His dear people. What are these enemies? Doubt, fear, and false doctrine and sin of every sort. It is the gravest temptation for pastors to see those wolves coming and run the other way and leave the sheep to the mercy of these ravenous wolves. It is a difficult thing to confront sin, to call sin what it is no matter who is committing it, and lovingly but firmly to call sinners to repentance. It is much easier to make peace, take half-measures, and compromise with falsehood, to be a hireling.

4 So where shall earthly pastors look for strength in fighting the good fight? And where shall the flock of God look for guidance in holding their earthly pastor accountable? To Jesus of course. Look at how Jesus deals with the wolves who come after his flock. When sin and death and the devil come calling, Jesus does not flinch. He does not negotiate. He does not try to make peace where there is no peace. He is after all the Good Pastor, the Good Shepherd, who would rather lose it all, rather lay down His life, than even for a moment expose His precious, little lambs to the danger of sin and false belief. For He knows well how deadly serious each and every sin is because He bore each and every sin on the cross. And He knows how deadly serious false belief is because He came to give His life that he might call us all away from all false belief and into His truth. He is not only the Good Shepherd but also the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

5 And so, dear flock, pray to your Real Shepherd for your earthly shepherd, and do it daily. I need it sorely. Demand of me what you know Jesus wants you to have: the Word of God in all its purity, calling you to repent of your sins and delivering to you the blood-bought Gospel of forgiveness to repentant sinners through preaching, teaching, baptizing, absolving, and communing. When I must bring the bitter word of Law to you or your relatives, calling you and them to repentance, know well that it comes from a loving heart that fears for Christ's little

lambs caught in sin or false belief – and know that it comes from a heart that is more afraid to anger the Real Shepherd than it is to anger you. Demand of me that I lose everything rather than leave you defenseless, that is, without the Word of God, in the face of false doctrine and sin. Forgive me my weakness, and pray for more strength. Accept the Word I bring to you from God not as my own, for that would truly be worth nothing at all. Accept it as coming from God himself by virtue of His calling me to His service. And, God forbid, should I ever bring you something other than God's Word, for your sake and mine, call me to repentance.

6 For there is one flock, and One Real Shepherd, just One Real Pastor for you beloved lambs of God. And what a Shepherd He is. And how He cares for you, His lamb! He leaves nothing to chance. For He, the Lord in the flesh, is your good shepherd. You shall not want for anything. How could you? He gives you all things: He leads you into green pastures to Baptism's still waters – where he plunges you in to restore your soul and wash you clean and make you His. He leads you in the paths of His righteousness; for his own Name's sake He forgives you your sin and gives you the righteousness He earned for you as He speaks his Word of Absolution to you.

7 Indeed, though you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, you need not fear any evil, for He is with you and He can never leave you. His rod and staff, the cross beams of the crucifix, with which God struck the Shepherd of Israel, comfort you. By His stripes you are healed; by his death you have life. He prepares a table for you in the presence of your enemies. Right here in the valley of the shadow of death, with fear and shame and disease and loneliness all around here, even here He prepares for you a table where you may receive the fruits of His cross, where you may receive the very Shepherd of the sheep, where you may feast on the body which bore your iniquity, where your cup runs over with the blood which makes the covenant of peace between you and God. Surely, goodness and mercy shall follow you all the days of your life, you are filled with the very body and blood of the Good Shepherd. And he who feasts on His flesh and drinks His blood, the Lord shall raise up on the last day. And you shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

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Pastor Jeff Hemmer