

Pastoral Care of Christ's Faithful

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Good Shepherd Model

A farmer had only one sheep which had gone astray. He went in search of it everywhere but could not find it. Finally he went to a park where a boy and a girl were making love. Looking at the face of the girl, the boy exclaimed: "Honey! I see the whole world on your face". Immediately the farmer asked the boy: "My dear young man, if you could see the whole world on the face of the girl, kindly tell me where my strayed sheep is standing".

This is an old joke meant to illustrate the concern of the shepherd for his strayed sheep.

There are so many models offered nowadays for the exercise of an effective pastoral ministry, for example, the good shepherd model, the prophetic model, the sacramental model, the servant model etc. None of these models is complete in itself. One model needs to be completed by other models. However, the good shepherd model seems to be the ideal model. It is an age old model which has not lost its freshness and relevance even today. In fact, Pope John Paul II, in his encyclical "*Pastores Dabo Vobis*" has offered the good shepherd model as the ideal model for pastoral ministry.

The Pope describes the whole life of Jesus Christ as a continual manifestation and daily enactment of his pastoral charity. Jesus presents himself as "the Good Shepherd" (Jn 10:11, 14), not only of Israel but of all humanity (cf. Jn 10:16).

Jesus feels compassion for the crowds because they were harassed and helpless (Mt 9:35-36). He goes in search of the straying

and scattered sheep (Mt 18:12-14) and joyfully celebrates their return. He gathers and protects them. He knows them and calls each one by name (Jn 10:3). He leads them to green pastures and still waters [Ps 22 (23)] and spreads a table for them, nourishing them with his own life. The Good Shepherd offers this life through his own Death and Resurrection.

The Pope concludes: *By virtue of their consecration, Priests are configured to Jesus the Good Shepherd and are called to imitate and live out his own pastoral charity* [Cf PDV, No. 21].

What is the identity and the mission of the Priest? A priest is sacramentally configured to Christ the Head and the Good shepherd and he acts in the very person of Christ when he discharges his office of teaching, sanctifying and ruling. His mission is that of the Good Shepherd. Pastoral charity characterizes the whole life of the priest. This is the sum and substance of the identity and the mission of the priest as highlighted by the Second Vatican Council [Cf. LG 11, PO 16], enunciated by the Encyclical *Pastores Dabo Vobis* of Pope JohnPaul II [Cf. Nos. 15, 18] and spelt out by the Code of Canon Law [Cf. Can. 1008].

Having opted for the Good Shepherd Model as the ideal model of pastoral ministry, let us analyse the pastoral and canonical implications of this model.

Total Availability

The shepherd is always with his flock. The image of the Good Shepherd brings out the active presence of God. In other religions, the static God resided in his temple from which he exercised power. When the people leave the temple, God remained in the temple. But Yahweh is different. He goes with His people. "I will place my dwelling in your midst, and I shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people" [Lev. 26:11-12]. God is Emmanuel [Mt 1:23]. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us [Jn 1:14]. I am with you always to the close of age [Mt 28:20].

The office of the good shepherd demands total availability to the flock entrusted to his pastoral care. The Code of Canon Law imposes the obligation of residence both on the diocesan bishops and the parish priest.

The bishops too are bound by the law of residence. Once I asked a certain parish priest whether he cooperated with his bishop. He replied: "How can I cooperate with him when he does not reside in the diocese, but tours about most of the time? I call him a tourist bishop".

Canon Law states in clear terms that the diocesan bishop is bound by the law of personal residence in the diocese [Can. 395, §1]; he may not be absent from the diocese for not longer than one month [Can. 395, §2]. He is not to be absent from his diocese on Christmas Day, during the Holy Week, on Easter Sunday, Pentecost and Corpus Christi [Can. 395, §3]. If the bishop is unlawfully absent from the diocese for more than six months, the Metropolitan is to notify to the Holy See [Can. 395, §4].

Hence there is no provision in the Code of Canon Law for a tourist bishop. Either he governs the diocese or quits the diocese.

Parish Priests

A certain lady has made the following remark about her parish priest: "Six days in the week he is invisible and on the seventh day he is incomprehensible". The parish priest in question does not remain in his parish during the six days in the week, and on the seventh day, that is, on Sunday no one is able to understand his homily.

It is humorously remarked that God worked on six days and rested on the seventh day. But priests work only one day and rest on six days!

According to Canon Law the parish priest is obliged to reside in his parochial house [Can. 533, §1]; he is entitled for one month's

holiday in a year; he is to inform the local ordinary for an absence of more than one week [Can. 533, §2].

Punishment

Those who gravely violate the obligation of residence can be punished with a just penalty including deprivation of the office [Can. 1396].

Moral Availability

It is not enough that the parish priest is physically present in the parish; he needs to be morally present, that is, available to the people all the time. *The office of the parish priest is a full time and not a part time job.*

In a certain parish people call their parish priest I. A. S. Officer. What does I. A. S. mean? "Invisible After Sunset". After 6.00 P.M. no one can see him. He lives in his own paradise!

House Visiting

The Good Shepherd knows his people [Jn 10:14]. A good many of the Catholics are leaving the Catholic Church and joining various Pentecostal sects. One of the reasons for such a mass exodus is the lack of pastoral care by the parish priests. The parish priests do not visit the houses of their parishioners whereas the Pentecostal preachers visit the families and pray intensely for their needs.

The diocesan bishops have the canonical obligation to visit all the parishes in their dioceses at least once in five years [Can. 396]. Once a diocesan bishop made a pastoral visit of a parish during which, as usual, he confirmed a lot of children. He asked the children, "When does the Holy Spirit come?" They replied: "Once in five years!".

The diocesan bishops could visit their entire diocese not only once in five years, but more often. It is heartening to see that some of the bishops of Tamilnadu visit all the families when they make pastoral

visits. The bishops are primarily pastors and not administrators! Some of the bishops would like to be called "His Efficiency" rather than "His Excellency".

"Being" is more important than "doing". Relation takes precedence over function. The sacred ministers must be pastors and not mere administrators. The priests of the third millennium are preachers of the word, ministers of the sacraments and leaders of the flock.

The sacred ministers should be able to say with the Apostles, "It is not right that we should neglect the Word of God in order to wait on tables" [Acts 6:2]. Just as the Apostles entrusted to the deacons the ministry of social work, the sacred ministers could entrust to the laity the temporal administration and school administration so that they could have more time for pastoral ministry.

The Code of Canon Law has made provisions for the laity to take up most of the administration of the diocese and the parish. Even the diocesan financial administrator (procurator) of the diocese can be a lay person.

The parish priest is asked by the Code of Canon Law to know the faithful entrusted to his care and to visit their families, sharing in their cares and anxieties. He is to visit the sick and the dying. He is to seek out the poor, the suffering, the lonely and the refugees. He is to help the spouses and parents and foster the growth of the Christian life in the family [Can. 529, §1].

The Good Shepherd goes after the lost sheep [Lk 15:4-5]. The principle of totality implies that one sheep is as important as the ninety nine sheep. Even if only one sheep is missing, there is no wholeness. Canon law exhorts the parish priest to make every effort to bring the gospel message to those also who have given up religious practice or who do not profess the true faith [Can. 528, §1]. Pastoral care of the lapsed Catholics is more important than that of the practising Catholics.

Human face of the Church

Jesus had compassion for the people who were harassed, helpless and without a shepherd [Mt 9:36]. The people of today needs shepherds with a compassionate heart.

The Church needs to show its human face. The greatest revolution of God was the Incarnation of the only begotten Son. The invisible God became visible. God became man. He showed his human face in such a way that the Apostle John could say: We have seen God with our eyes and touched him with our hands (cf. 1 Jn 1:1-2). Speaking about the incarnation of Christ, St. Paul writes: "... the goodness and loving kindness of God our saviour appeared" [Tit 3:4].

Jesus was both Teacher and Good Shepherd. As teacher he taught that even to look at a woman with a lustful eye is tantamount to committing adultery with her in heart [cf. Mt 5:28]. But as Good Shepherd he told the woman caught in adultery: "I do not condemn you. Sin no more" [cf. Jn 8:11]. *Jesus did not advocate relativism in his moral teaching. But he took a lenient approach towards sinners.*

Radical Change

There is a radical change in the pastoral approach of the Church towards the divorced and remarried. This radical change is clearly seen in the Encyclical *Familiaris Consortio* of Pope John Paul II [cf. Nos. 79-84].

The following statement of the Pope is unparalleled in the history of the Church and it will have a far reaching consequence: "Together with the synod, I earnestly call upon pastors and the whole community of the faithful to help the divorced and with solicitous care to make sure that *they do not consider themselves as separated from the Church, for as baptized persons they can, and indeed must, share in her life.* They should be encouraged to listen to the Word of God, to attend the sacrifice of the Mass, to persevere in prayer, to contribute to works of charity and to community efforts in favour of justice, to bring up the children in the Christian faith, to cultivate the spirit and

practice of penance and thus implore, day by day, God's grace. Let the Church pray for them, encourage them and show herself a merciful mother, and thus sustain in faith and hope" [No. 84].

Since the divorced and remarried have not upheld the teaching of Christ on the indissolubility of marriage, they are not to be admitted to the Eucharist. But they are not at all excommunicated from the Church. They remain very much part of the Church. They can and should participate in the life of the Church. Participation in the life of the Church is not reduced to participation in the sacraments.

The children of the divorced and remarried can and should be baptized. They are on a par with legitimate children with regard to the reception of the sacraments and other canonical rights. Children are not to be penalized for the faults of their parents.

In his Encyclical *Familiaris Consortio*, Pope John Paul II has demonstrated how *the Church could manifest her motherly concern towards the divorced and remarried without compromising its doctrine on the indissolubility of marriage*. The sacred ministers cannot afford to be inhuman towards those who have deviated from the right path. They cannot be more catholic than the Catholic Church itself.

Shameful Gain

A rich man wanted the parish priest to give his dog a catholic burial. The parish priest became furious and was almost about to beat the rich man. But when the rich man was prepared to pay one thousand rupees for the catholic burial of his dog, the parish priest got cooled down and said: "O.K. I can give a catholic burial to your dog. After all it is a catholic dog!". Money had changed the whole attitude of the parish priest.

The sacred ministers are to be extremely careful not to exploit the people, especially the poor while discharging their pastoral

ministries keeping in mind the words of St. Paul: "the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil" [1 Tim 6:10].

The faithful are terribly shocked when they see their pastors money minded and charging them heavily for the administration of the sacraments. The code of Canon Law has laid down strict norms concerning the offering to be received from the faithful on the occasion of the administration of the sacraments.

Christ's faithful have a fundamental Christian right to receive the sacraments [Can. 213]. The sacred pastors may not deny the sacraments to the people who are not prohibited by law [Can. 843, §1].

For the administration of the sacraments the sacred ministers may not ask for anything beyond the offerings determined by the competent authority and the poor are not to be deprived of the sacraments [Can. 848]. Care is to be taken that the poor are not deprived of proper funeral rites [Can. 1181]. Even the semblance of trafficking or trading is to be entirely excluded from Mass offerings [Can. 947].

Buying and selling spiritual goods is called simony. A person who through simony celebrates or receives a sacrament is to be punished with an interdict or suspension [Can. 1380].

Conclusion

In the words of Pope John Paul II: "We are living in a disoriented world with discordant notes". People lack a sense of orientation and direction. They are harassed and hopeless. They are like sheep without a shepherd. *Hence the people of today need more than ever the leadership of good shepherds, sacred ministers who are capable of representing Christ, the only one good shepherd in whom all the other shepherds are included.*

Unfortunately the sacred ministers tend to project the image of administrators rather than the image of good shepherds. It is high time

that they share their administrative load with matured and committed laity and concentrate on pastoral care of their flock.

Despite the proliferation of prayer groups, various movements and encounters, the parish remains the one stable unity, the one sacramental sign of the compassionate and comforting Christ. In the words of Pope John XXIII, the parish remains 'the village formation' to which all would have recourse in their thirst.

People are desperately searching for a sense of belonging, an identity. They are in search of a community where they are accepted, appreciated and loved. Hence the sacred ministers, both bishops and priests, are to build up a Christian community based on love and compassion, revealing the human face of the Church, always keeping in mind that the *spiritual welfare of the faithful is the supreme law in the Church* [Cf. Can. 1752].

Sources

Documents of Sacred Vatican Council

The Code of Canon Law

John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, Familiaris Consortio

John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, Pastores Dabo Vobis