

Installation of Fr. Jesse Bolger as Pastor of St. Clare Parish, Essex

Introduction

A pastor can find both instruction and inspiration for his life and ministry on almost every page of Scripture. Today's Gospel is a case in point: it's the story of how Jesus cured a foreign woman's daughter. This passage demonstrates *how not* to be a pastor. Then it demonstrates *how* to be a pastor for in it, Jesus the Good Shepherd himself gives us instruction.

The Disciples: A Study In How *Not* To Be a Pastor

In our passage from St. Matthew's Gospel, the disciples give us an object lesson on how *not* to be a pastor.

At first, Jesus seemed to ignore the Canaanite woman who pleaded not for herself but for her daughter. After all she was a foreigner, so the disciples assumed that Jesus did not want to be bothered. Certainly *they* were bothered by her persistence. "Get rid of her!" they besought Jesus.

The disciples demonstrate how not be pastors in two ways: First, because they do not yet understand what is in Jesus' heart; and, second, because they tried to act as his "handlers" to keep a problem case away from the Master and from themselves.

St. John Paul II often stressed pastoral charity. He challenged those of us who are your pastors that our personalities are to be like bridges to Christ. Our task is not to keep those we serve away from Jesus but to bring them into contact, even intimacy, with the Lord. So too Pope Francis urges pastors to be missionaries - to bring the Gospel not only to those who are already disciples but rather to the margins, to the poor, the sick, the unchurched. But for the moment, suffice it to say that the disciples got it wrong.

How Jesus Was A Pastor

Let's now move to the positive side of the ledger. In the Gospel, Jesus, in dealing with the Canaanite woman, demonstrates *how* to be a pastor, but not in ways we

might expect.

To see this, we have to admit that Jesus' own behavior is probably not what we'd expect of a parish priest. A woman is pleading with him for help. But the Gospel recounts that 'Jesus did not say a word to her.' If that happened in a parish on Sunday, I'd get a letter on Monday!

And that isn't all. If we pay attention to this little passage, we're even more surprised. Jesus seems to put a further obstacle in the woman's way. He says to her in effect, 'I was sent only to the Chosen People and you're a foreigner.' And when she pleaded further with him he told her, 'It's not right to take the food that belongs to the children ... that is, to the Chosen People, and to throw it to the dogs ... that is, to foreigners!' Wouldn't we expect Jesus to have said, "Of course, I'll help you!"

But Jesus tests the woman's faith. I am reminded of the passage from the 1st Letter of John where we are told to test the spirits to see which are from God. So Jesus is testing the depth and persistence of the woman's faith. In doing so, he elicits from her a deep, humble confession of faith. In so doing, he heals both mother and daughter.

How Priests Should Pastor

Today's Gospel passage isn't a comprehensive job description for a pastor but it does get to the heart of the matter. The pastor's primary mission is to continue the mission of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, whom we just met in the Gospel. Like Jesus, almost every pastor is confronted with many requests and demands. The pastor is not to ignore the requests that are inconvenient nor to dismiss those whose persistence can be vexing.

His role is to engage parishioners, to test their faith, to challenge them to a deep, integral, and persistent faith that will endure the crises of living and dying, and the challenges of our secular culture. His mission from the Lord is to create a community of faith, worship, & service, centered on the Sunday Eucharist, — a community made up of individuals who can say with St. Paul: "who will separate us from the love of Christ?"

And with the grace of the Holy Spirit, it is the pastor's role to lead his people into

become a missionary parish, a parish that reaches out to the newly arrived, to the stranger, to those who have been estranged from the faith, and to those who have never had any faith at all. Again and again Pope Francis tells us to go beyond our comfort zone so as to lead those searching for truth and love to Jesus and to his Church.

The Pastor does not do this on his own but in closest union with Jesus the Good Shepherd, a closeness that is expressed in his union with the Holy Father, with me, your Bishop, and with his fellow priests. To fulfill his role, the pastor acts in the very person of Christ, preaching not his own word, but God's Word alive in the Church; and celebrating not himself but rather what God has done for us in the Mass and the sacraments, given us by the Church. All this he does as both priest and disciple, striving daily to open his own heart to Christ, and to live the Gospel he preaches and celebrates in the Eucharist.

Conclusion

I don't need to tell you that in Fr. Bolger you have such a pastor! Since coming here to St. Clare, he has shown himself to have the heart of a pastor who generously gives of himself and his many talents day in and day out. Today I'm delighted to make it official that Fr. Bolger is your pastor and to join you in praying that God will bless this parish community of St. Clare now and for many years to come. May God bless us and keep us always in His love!

Español

La Biblia le enseña a un sacerdote no sólo como vivir como discípulo, sino también como ser un buen pastor. En el evangelio de hoy tenemos un ejemplo claro.

Primero, el comportamiento de los discípulos nos muestra lo contrario del ejemplo de un buen pastor. Ellos están molestos que la mujer pide ayuda, y quieren que Jesús le atienda, no porque ella necesita la atención, sino porque los gritos de ella les molesta. Los discípulos no han entendido lo que significa ser buenos pastores.

Tanto San Juan Pablo segundo como el Papa Francisco, nos han dicho que la labor pastoral consiste en ser puentes para que la gente llegue a Cristo. No debemos ser

obstáculos; debemos ser puentes para invitar a los demás a conocer a Cristo, especialmente a quienes están en la periferia, los enfermos, los pobres, los que sufren, los que no saben de Dios.

Al contrario de los discípulos, Jesús nos muestra como ser un buen pastor, Parecería que él no quiere ayudar a la mujer de Canaán Él les dice a los discípulos que él ha venido a ayudar al pueblo de Israel, no a los extranjeros de Canaán. La mujer continua pidiendo ayuda; su fe es persistente, y su hija es curada. Jesús muestra lo que significa ser buen pastor significa prestar atención a las necesidades de la comunidad; significa no ignorar los pedidos que parezcan inconvenientes o molestos; significa continuar la misión del amor de Dios.

Demos gracias al Señor, que ustedes ya tienen un buen pastor! Desde que llego a Santa Clara, el Padre Bolger se ha entregado a la misión pastoral de esta comunidad. Hoy estoy muy contento de estar aquí para instalar de manera oficial al Padre Bolger como el párroco de ustedes. Juntos oremos para que Dios bendiga a Santa Clara hoy y en el futuro.