



From A Bishop's Journal (695)

A Pastor in the Likeness of God

What is a shepherd after the heart of God?" Saint John Eudes asked in 1673 in one of his many books addressed to the faithful and to his brother priests. Such a question is still valid today. The words 'chaplain', 'pastor', 'curate', and 'moderator' do not quite express the glorious vocation to which the chosen one has been called from all eternity, and dedicated to the happiness of his brothers and sisters in the world today. I would like to share with you a few of St. John Eudes' answers to the above question.

A Father

A pastor after the heart of God "Is a real father to God's people, with a heart filled with truly fatherly love for his children. That love prompts him to work unceasingly to nourish his flock with the bread of the sacred Word and of the sacraments, to clothe the faithful with Christ and the Holy Spirit, to enrich them with all possible advantages regarding their eternal salvation." Despite the fact that the definition or description is over 350 years old, it fares well against modern writings on the life and ministry of priests. It can even help us respond to the recommendations of the March 2006 Pastoral Orientation Congress on ordained ministries.

An Evangelist

A pastor after the heart of God "Is an evangelist and an apostle whose chief work is to preach, both publicly and privately, by word and example, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is to continue and perpetuate the functions the Apostles were commissioned to perform, and to practise the virtues they practised." Since Vatican II opportunities have not been lacking to proclaim God's Word through our liturgical actions, but this Word which is first sown in the pastor's heart must constantly burst forth. We must find the words needed to reach the cultures of today so as to make relevant the Good News of Jesus.

A Light

A pastor after the heart of God "Is an ever burning and shining light set on the candelabra of Mother Church, burning before God and shining before men; burning with his own love for God, shining

by his charity for his fellowman; burning with the perfection of his inner life, shining by the holiness of his exterior conduct; burning in continual prayer to God for the needs of his people, shining by his preaching of the Word of God.” To those who remarked to Saint John Vianney that there was not much love in his parish, the holy pastor simply answered that they themselves had to quickly set to it!

A Saviour

A good pastor is “A holy priest is a saviour and another Christ on earth, representing him, clothed with his authority, acting in his name, adorned with his qualifications, established to continue the work of salvation. In imitation of his Redeemer, he gives himself: mind, heart, affections, strength, time, all for God. He is ever ready to sacrifice his very blood and even life itself to procure the salvation of souls, particularly those of his own flock.” Far from being a passing glory, this likeness to Christ has its own radical requirements, day after day.

Another Christ

A pastor after the heart of God “Is a living image of Christ in this world, the Christ who watched, prayed, preached, catechised, worked, went from town to town and village to village, suffering, agonising, dying and sacrificing himself for the salvation of all the souls created in his image and likeness.” Such definitions are not found in sociology manuals or as career descriptions. This shows that human words are not enough to express the depth of mystery of the priestly ministry, its beauty as well as the demands of such a vocation.

A Beginning of Love

When we read such descriptions of what it means to be a pastor after the heart of God, we give thanks for this extraordinary mission given to some of us, but priests are not usually prone to broadcast that they have started for good being in their daily lives, pastors in the likeness of God. For myself, and without false modesty, I beg forgiveness of my brothers and sisters for not having become, after 42 years of priesthood, a pastor in the likeness of God. I can tell you that I often pray: “Lord, may I finally begin to love you. Help me be a pastor according to your heart.”

A Stimulating Holiness

When I realise the degree of holiness achieved by some, when I see how they have responded to their baptismal call, when I see my confreres courageously give of themselves to those in their care, when I see in families, parishes, and congregations brothers and sisters whose lives are exemplary, it is cause for permanent gratitude, I marvel at their kindness, their generosity, and their attachment to Jesus Christ. They are an incentive to me to live fully my vocation to the ordained ministry and to the mission given to me to proclaim God’s Word, to celebrate the sacraments, and to promote unity and communion among the people of God.

Witness

Like Him, let us respond to the will of God. Like Him, let us tie an apron around our waists, rise and serve every day, through love. Like Him, let us proclaim his Word and gather his people. Because of the cross raised in America, let us tell the world about the wonders of God.

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