

# SERMON ON PASTORS

## ST AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

### OFFICE OF READINGS

#### Sunday in the 24<sup>th</sup> Week of Ordinary Time

You have often learned that all our hope is in Christ and that he is our true glory and our salvation. You are members of the flock of the Good Shepherd, who watches over Israel and nourishes his people. Yet there are shepherds who want to have the title of shepherd without wanting to fulfill a pastor's duties; let us then recall what God says to his shepherds through the prophet. You must listen attentively; I must listen with fear and trembling.

*The word of the Lord came to me and said: Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel and speak to the shepherds of Israel. We just heard this reading a moment ago, my brothers, and I have decided to speak to you on this passage. The Lord will help me to speak the truth if I do not speak on my own authority. For if I speak on my own authority, I will be a shepherd nourishing myself and not the sheep. However, if my words are the Lord's, then he is nourishing you no matter who speaks. Thus says the Lord God: Shepherds of Israel, who have been nourishing only themselves! Should not the shepherds nourish the sheep? In other words, true shepherds take care of their sheep, not themselves. This is the principle reason why God condemns those shepherds: they took care of themselves rather than their sheep. Who are they who nourish themselves? They are the shepherds the Apostle described when he said: They all seek what is theirs and not what is Christ's.*

I must distinguish carefully between two aspects of the role the Lord has given me, a role that demands a rigorous accountability, a role based on the Lord's greatness rather than on my own merit. The first aspect is that I am a Christian; the second, that I am a leader. I am a Christian for my own sake, whereas I am a leader for your sake; the fact that I am a Christian is to my own advantage, but I am a leader for your advantage.



Many persons come to God as Christians but not as leaders. Perhaps they travel by an easier road and are less hindered since they bear a lighter burden. In addition to the fact that I am a Christian and must give God an account of my life, I as a leader must give him an account of my stewardship as well.

### **Monday in the 24<sup>th</sup> Week of Ordinary Time**

Let us consider the unflattering words of God which Scripture addresses to shepherds who feed themselves and not the sheep. *You consume their milk and cover yourselves with their wool; you kill the fatlings, but my sheep you do not pasture. You have failed to strengthen what was weak, to heal what was sick, and to bind up what was injured. You did not call back what went astray, nor seek out what was lost. What was strong you have destroyed, and my sheep have been scattered because there is no shepherd.*

This is spoken to the shepherds who feed themselves and not the sheep; it speaks of their concern and their neglect. What is their concern? *You consume their milk and cover yourselves with their wool.* And so the Apostle asks: *Who plants a vineyard and does not eat from its fruit? Who pastures a flock and does not drink from the milk of the flock?* Thus we learn that the milk of the flock is whatever temporal support and sustenance God's people give to those who are placed over them. It is of this that the Apostle was speaking in the passage just quoted.

Although he chose to support himself by the labor of his own hands and not to ask for milk from the sheep, the Apostle did say that he had the right to receive the milk, for the Lord had established that they who preach the Gospel should live from the Gospel. Paul also says that other of his fellow apostles made use of this right, a right granted them, and not unlawfully usurped. But Paul went further by not taking what was rightfully his. He forgave the debt, whereas the others did not demand what was not due them. Therefore Paul went further. Perhaps his action was foreshadowed by the Good Samaritan who, when he brought the sick man to the inn, said: *If you spend any more, I will repay you on my way back.*

What more can I say concerning those shepherds who do not need the milk of the flock? They are more merciful; or rather, they carry out a more abundant ministry of mercy. They are able to do so, and they do it. Let them receive praise, but do not condemn the others. The Apostle himself did not seek what was given. However, he wanted the sheep to be fruitful, not sterile and unable to give milk.

### **Tuesday in the 24<sup>th</sup> Week of Ordinary Time**

Once when Paul was in great need, in chains for his confession of the truth, his

fellow Christians sent him what was necessary for his wants and needs. He thanked them with these words: *You have done well to share in my needs. It is true that I have leaned to be self-sufficient in whatever circumstances I find myself. I know what it is to have plenty and I have learned how to endure privation. I can do all things in him who strengthens me. Still you have done well to send things for my use.*

Just as this indicates in what sense they had done well, it also shows what Paul himself sought, namely, to avoid being numbered among those who feed themselves and not the sheep. For he does not so much rejoice at his own deliverance from need as he does at their generosity. What then was he seeking? *I do not set my heart upon gifts, he says; all I seek for is the fruit of my labor.* Not that I may be filled, he says, but that you may not remain empty.

As for those who cannot support themselves with their own hands as Paul did, let them take from the milk of the sheep, let them receive what is necessary for their needs, but let them not neglect the weakness of the sheep. Let them not seek any benefit for themselves, lest they appear to be preaching the Gospel for the sake of their own need and privation; rather, let them provide the light of the true word for the sake of men's enlightenment. For they are like lamps, as it has been said: *Let your belts be fastened and your lamps burning, and: No one lights a lamp and puts it under a bushel basket; rather, he puts it on a lamp stand, that it may give light to all who are in the house; so let your light shine before men in order that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.*

Now if a lamp has been lighted for you in your house, would you not add oil to keep it from going out? Of course, if the lamp received the oil and failed to shine, it was obviously not fit to be put on the lamp stand and should have been discarded at once. But for the light to be kept alive it must receive fuel which is to be provided out of charity. Only let not the Gospel be for sale, with preachers demanding a price for it and making their living from it. If they sell it like that, they are selling for a pittance something that is of great value. Let them receive support in their need from the people, but payment for their stewardship from the Lord. No, it is not right for the people to give payment to those who serve them out of love of the Gospel. Payment is to be expected only from the one who also grants salvation.

Why then are they rebuked? Why are they accused? Because, when they took the milk and covered themselves with the wool, they neglected the sheep. They sought only to serve their own cause and not Christ's.

## Wednesday in the 24<sup>th</sup> Week of Ordinary Time

I have explained what it means to consume milk. Now let us consider what it means to clothe with wool. One who gives milk gives sustenance, while one who gives wool gives honor. These are precisely the two things that pastors, who feed themselves and not the sheep, look for from the people—the benefit of having their wants supplied as well as the favor of honor and praise.

Yes, clothing can well be taken to mean honor, since it covers nakedness. For every man without exception is weak. And who is any man placed over you except someone just like yourself. Your pastor is in the flesh, he is mortal, he eats, sleeps and awakens; he was born and he is going to die. In himself he is, when you think of it, simply a man. But it is true that you make him something more by giving him honor; it is as if you were covering what is weak.

Consider the nature of the clothing that the apostle Paul received from God's good people. He said: *You have received me like an angel of God. I testify that if it were possible you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me.* Indeed great honor was shown to him. But did he then spare sinners because of that honor, perhaps out of fear that it would be refused and that he would receive less praise when he gave blame? Had he done so, he would be among those shepherds who feed themselves and not the sheep. He would then say to himself: "What has this to do with me? Let everyone do what he will; my sustenance is safe, and my honor too. I have enough milk and wool, so let each one do as he likes." But then are things really secure for you if each one does as he pleases? I do not want to make you a leader over the people but one of them. *If one member suffers, all the members suffer with him.*

In recalling how they treated him, the Apostle does not want to appear forgetful of the honor they did him. Therefore he gives testimony that they received him like an angel of God, that if it were possible, they were willing to tear out their eyes and give them to him. Yet he still comes to the sheep that is ill, to the one that is diseased, to cut the wound and not to spare the diseased part. He says: Have I then become your enemy by preaching the truth? He took from the milk of the sheep, as I mentioned a short time ago, and he was clothed with their wool, but he did not neglect his sheep. He did not seek what was his but what was Christ's.

## Thursday in the 24<sup>th</sup> Week of Ordinary Time

After the Lord had shown what wicked shepherds esteem, he also spoke about what they neglect. The defects of the sheep are widespread. There are very few healthy and sound sheep, few that are solidly sustained by the food of truth, and few that

enjoy the good pasture God gives them. But the wicked shepherds do not spare such sheep. It is not enough that they neglect those that are ill and weak, those that go stray and are lost. They even try, so far as it is in their power, to kill the strong and healthy. Yet such sheep live; yes, by God's mercy they live. As for the wicked shepherds themselves, they kill the sheep. "How do they kill them?" you ask. By their wicked lives and by giving bad example. Or was God's servant, who was high among the members of the chief shepherd, told this in vain: *Show yourself as an example of good works toward all men, and, Be an example to the faithful?*

Even the strong sheep, if he turns his eyes from the Lord's laws and looks at the man set over him, notices when his shepherd is living wickedly and begins to say in his heart: "If my pastor lives like that, why should I not live like him?" The wicked shepherd kills the strong sheep. But if he kills the strong one what does he do to the rest? After all, by his wicked life he kills even the sheep he had not strengthened but had found strong and hardy.

I appeal to your love, and again I say, even if the sheep have life and if they are strong in the word of the Lord, and if they hold fast to what they have heard from their Lord, *Do what they say but not what they do.* Still, as far as he himself is concerned, the shepherd who lives a wicked life before the people kills the sheep under his care. Let such a shepherd not deceive himself because the sheep is not dead, for though it still lives, he is a murderer - just as when the lustful man looks on a woman with desire, even though she is chaste, he has committed adultery. For the Lord said in plain truth: *Whoever has looked upon a woman with desire has already committed adultery with her in his heart.* He has not entered her bedroom, yet he has ravished her within the bedroom of his heart.

### **Friday in the 24<sup>th</sup> Week of Ordinary Time**

You have already been told about the wicked things shepherds desire. Let us now consider what they neglect. *You have failed to strengthen what was weak, to heal what was sick and to bind up what was injured, that is, what was broken. You did not call back the straying sheep, nor seek out the lost. What was strong you have destroyed.* Yes, you have cut it down and killed it. The sheep is weak, and so, incautious and unprepared, it may give in to temptations.

The negligent shepherd fails to say to the believer: *My son, come to the service of God, stand fast in fear and in righteousness, and prepare your soul for temptation.* A shepherd who does say this strengthens the one who is weak and makes him strong. Such a believer will then not hope for the prosperity of this world. For if he has been taught to hope

for worldly gain, he will be corrupted by prosperity. When adversity comes, he will be wounded or perhaps destroyed.

The builder who builds in such manner is not building the believer on a rock but upon sand. *But the rock was Christ.* Christians must imitate Christ's sufferings, not set their hearts on pleasures. He who is weak will be strengthened when told: "Yes, expect the temptations of this world, but the Lord will deliver you from them all if your heart has not abandoned him. For it was to strengthen your heart that he came to suffer and die, came to be spit upon and crowned with thorns, came to be accused of shameful things, yes, came to be fastened to the wood of the cross. All these things he did for you, and you did nothing. He did them not for himself, but for you."

But what sort of shepherds are they who for fear of giving offense not only fail to prepare the sheep for the temptations that threaten, but even promise them worldly happiness? God himself made no such promise to this world. On the contrary, God foretold hardship upon hardship in this world until the end of time. And you want the Christian to be exempt from these troubles? Precisely because he is a Christian, he is destined to suffer more in this world.

For the Apostle says: *All who desire to live a holy life in Christ will suffer persecution.* But you, shepherd, seek what is yours and not what is Christ's, you disregard what the Apostle says: *All who want to live a holy life in Christ will suffer persecution.* You say instead: "If you live a holy life in Christ, all good things will be yours in abundance. If you do not have children, you will embrace and nourish all men, and none of them shall die." Is this the way you build up the believer? Take note of what you are doing and where you are placing him. you have built him on sand. The rains will come, the river will overflow and rush in, the winds will blow, and the elements will dash against that house of yours. It will fall, and its ruin will be great.

Lift him up from the sand and put him on the rock. Let him be in Christ, if you wish him to be a Christian. Let him turn his thoughts to sufferings, however unworthy they may be in comparison to Christ's. Let him center his attention on Christ, who was without sin, and yet made restitution for what he had not done. Let him consider Scripture, which says to him: *He chastises every son whom he acknowledges.* Let him prepare to be chastised, or else not seek to be acknowledged as a son.

### **Saturday in the 24<sup>th</sup> Week of Ordinary Time**

Scripture says: *God chastises every son whom he acknowledges.* But the bad shepherd says: "Perhaps I will be exempt." If he is exempt from the suffering of his chastisements, then he is not numbered among God's sons. You will say: "Does God indeed punish

every son?" Yes, every one, just as he chastised his only Son. His only Son, born of the substance of the Father, equal to the Father *in the form of God*, the Word through whom all things were made, he could not be chastised. For this reason he was clothed with flesh so that he might know chastisement. God punishes his only Son who is without sin; does he then leave unpunished an adopted son who is with sin?" The Apostle says that we have been called to adoption. We have been adopted as sons, that we might be coheirs with the only Son, and also that we might be his inheritance: *Ask of me and I will give you the nations as your inheritance*. Christ gave us the example by his own sufferings.

But clearly one who is weak must neither be deceived with false hope nor broken by fear. Otherwise he may fail when temptations come. Say to him: *Prepare your soul for temptation*. Perhaps he is starting to falter, to tremble with fear, perhaps he is unwilling to approach. You have another passage of Scripture for him: *God is faithful. He does not allow you to be tempted beyond your strength*. Make that promise while preaching about the sufferings to come, and you will strengthen the man who is weak. When someone is held back because of excessive fear, promise him God's mercy. It is not that temptations will be lacking, but that God will not permit anyone to be tempted beyond what he can bear. In this manner you will be binding up the broken one.

When they hear of the trials that are coming, some men arm themselves more and, so to speak, are eager to drain the cup. The ordinary medicine of the faithful seems to them but a small thing; for their part they seek the glorious death of the martyrs. Others hear of the temptations to come, and when they do arrive, as arrive they must, they become broken and lame. Yet it is right that such things befall the Christian, and no one esteems them except the one who desires to be a true Christian.

Offer the bandage of consolation, bind up what has been broken. Say this: "Do not be afraid. God in whom you have believed does not abandon you in temptations. God is faithful. He does not allow you to be tempted beyond your strength. It is not I who say this, but the Apostle, and he says further: *Are you willing to accept his trial, the trial of Christ who speaks in me?* When you hear this you are hearing it from Christ himself, you are hearing it from the shepherd who gives pasture to Israel. For of him it was said: *You will give us tears to drink in measure*. The Apostle says: *He does not allow you to be tempted beyond your strength*. This is also what the prophet intends by adding the words: *in measure*. God rebukes but also encourages, he brings fear and he brings consolation, he strikes and he heals. Do not reject him."

## Sunday in the 25<sup>th</sup> Week of Ordinary Time

*You have failed to strengthen the weak*, says the Lord. He is speaking to wicked shepherds, false shepherds, shepherds who seek their own concerns and not those of Christ. They enjoy the bounty of milk and wool, but they take no care at all of the sheep, and they make no effort to heal those who are ill. I think there is a difference between one who is weak (that is, not strong) and one who is ill, although we often say that the weak are also suffering from illness.

My brothers, when I try to make that distinction, perhaps I could do it better and with greater precision, or perhaps someone with more experience and insight could do so. But when it comes to the words of Scripture, I say what I think so that in the meantime you will not be deprived of all profit. In the case of the weak sheep, it is to be feared that the temptation, when it comes, may break him. The sick person, however, is already ill by reason of some illicit desire or other, and this is keeping him from entering God's path and submitting to Christ's yoke.

There are men who want to live a good life and have already decided to do so, but are not capable of bearing sufferings even though they are ready to do good. Now it is a part of the Christian's strength not only to do good works but also to endure evil. Weak men are those who appear to be zealous in doing good works but are unwilling or unable to endure the sufferings that threaten. Lovers of the world, however, who are kept from good works by some evil desire, lie sick and listless, and it is this sickness that deprives them of any strength to accomplish good works.

The paralytic was like that. When his bearers could not bring him in to the Lord, they opened the roof and lowered him down to the feet of Christ. Perhaps you wish to do this in spirit: to open the roof and to lower a paralytic soul down to the Lord. All its limbs are lifeless, it is empty of every good work, burdened with its sins, and weak from the illness brought on by its evil desires. Since all its limbs are helpless, and the paralysis is interior, you cannot come to the physician. But perhaps the physician is himself concealed within; for the true understanding of Scripture is hidden. Reveal therefore what is hidden, and thus you will open the roof and lower the paralytic to the feet of Christ.

As for those who fail to do this and those who are negligent, you have heard what was said to them: *You have failed to heal the sick; you have failed to bind up what was broken*. Of this we have already spoken. Man was broken by terrible temptations. But there is at hand a consolation that will bind what was broken: *God is faithful. He does not allow you to be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it*.

## Monday in the 25<sup>th</sup> Week of Ordinary Time

*The straying sheep you have not recalled; the lost sheep you have not sought.* In one way or another, we go on living between the hands of robbers and the teeth of raging wolves, and in light of these present dangers we ask your prayers. The sheep moreover are insolent. The shepherd seeks out the straying sheep, but because they have wandered away and are lost they say that they are not ours. “Why do you want us? Why do you seek us?” they ask, as if their straying and being lost were not the very reason for our wanting them and seeking them out. “If I am straying,” he says, “if I am lost, why do you want me?” You are straying, that is why I wish to recall you. You have been lost, I wish to find you. “But I wish to stray,” he says: “I wish to be lost.”

So you wish to stray and be lost? How much better that I do not also wish this. Certainly, I dare say, I am unwelcome. But I listen to the Apostle who says: *Preach the word; insist upon it, welcome and unwelcome.* Welcome to whom? Unwelcome to whom? By all means welcome to those who desire it; unwelcome to those who do not. However unwelcome, I dare to say: “You wish to stray, you wish to be lost; but I do not want this.” For the one whom I fear does not wish this. And should I wish it, consider his words of reproach: *The straying sheep you have not recalled; the lost sheep you have not sought.* Shall I fear you rather than him? *Remember, we must all present ourselves before the judgement seat of Christ.*

I shall recall the straying; I shall seek the lost. Whether they wish it or not, I shall do it. And should the brambles of the forests tear at me when I seek them, I shall force myself through all straits; I shall put down all hedges. So far as the God whom I fear grants me the strength, I shall search everywhere. I shall recall the straying; I shall seek after those on the verge of being lost. If you do not want me to suffer, do not stray, do not become lost. It is enough that I lament your straying and loss. No, I fear that in neglecting you, I shall also kill what is strong. Consider the passage that follows: *And what was strong you have destroyed.* Should I neglect the straying and lost, the strong one will also take delight in straying and in being lost.

## Tuesday in the 25<sup>th</sup> Week of Ordinary Time

*They were scattered on every mountain and on every hill and over the entire face of the earth.* What is the meaning of the phrase: *They were scattered over the entire face of the earth?* Some men continually strive for all the goods of the world, the goods that are so evident on the face of the earth; yes, they love and prize them. They do not want to die, to have their lives buried in Christ. *Over the entire face of the earth:* such men love earthly things; moreover such straying sheep are to be found over the entire face

of the earth. They dwell indifferent places, but one mother, pride, has given birth to them all, just as one mother, our Catholic Church, has given birth to all faithful Christians scattered over the whole world.

Small wonder that pride gives birth to division, and love to unity. But our catholic mother is herself a shepherd; she seeks the straying sheep everywhere, strengthens the weak, heals the sick, and binds up the injured. They may not know one another, but she knows all of them because she reaches out to all her sheep.

Thus she is like a vine that is spread out everywhere in its growth. The straying sheep are like useless branches which because of their sterility are deservedly cut off, not to destroy the vine but to prune it. When these branches were cut down, they were left lying there. But the vine grew and flourished, and it knew both the branches that remained upon it and those that had been cut off and left lying beside it.

She calls the stray sheep back, however, because the Apostle said in reference to the broken branches: *God has the power to graft them on again.* Call them sheep straying from the flock or branches cut off from the vine, God is equally capable of calling back the sheep or of grafting the branches on again, for he is equally the chief shepherd and the true farmer. *And they were scattered over the entire face of the earth, and there was no one to search for them, no one to call them back,* that is to say, no one among those wicked shepherds. *There was no one to search for them,* that is, no one among men.

*Therefore, shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: I live, says the Lord God.* Notice the beginning of this passage; it is as if "God were taking an oath, giving testimony to his own life. *I live, says the Lord.* The shepherds are dead, but the sheep are safe, for the Lord lives. *I live, says the Lord God.* Which shepherds are dead? Those who seek what is theirs and not what is Christ's. But will there be shepherds who seek what is Christ's and not what is theirs, and will they be found? There will indeed be such shepherds, and they will indeed be found; they are not lacking, nor will they be lacking in the future.

### **Wednesday in the 25<sup>th</sup> Week of Ordinary Time**

*Shepherds, hear the word of the Lord.* But what are the shepherds to hear? *Thus says the Lord God: Behold I myself am over the shepherds, and I will claim my sheep from their hands.*

Hear and learn, you sheep of God. God calls for an accounting of his sheep from the wicked shepherds and inquires into the death of his sheep at their hands. For in another passage he speaks through the same prophet: *Son of man, I have appointed you a*

*watchman for the house of Israel. You shall hear the word from my mouth and you shall point out the way to them in my name. When I say to the sinner: You shall die, and you do not speak to warn the wicked man from his wicked way, because of his wickedness he shall die, but you shall be held responsible for his death. If, however, you warn the wicked man to turn away from his wickedness, and he fails to do so, he shall die in his iniquity, but you shall have saved your soul.*

Dear brothers, what does this mean? Do you see how dangerous it is to keep silent? The sinner dies and rightly so; he dies in his wickedness and in his sin, for his failure to heed you has killed him. He could have found the Lord, the living shepherd who says: *I live*. But he was heedless; and the one appointed for this task, the watchman, did not warn him. The wicked one then justly suffers death and the watchman rightly suffers damnation. But the Lord says, if you say to the wicked man: *You shall surely die*, and if he fails to heed the sword of judgment with which I have threatened him, that sword will overtake and kill him, and he will die in his sin; but you will have saved your soul. Therefore it is our task not to keep silent, and it is your task, even if we ourselves are silent, to hear the words of the shepherd from the Scriptures.

I have said that he will take the sheep from the bad shepherds and give them to shepherds who are good. Let us consider whether he does so. I see him taking the seep from the bad shepherds, when he says: *Behold, I myself am over the shepherds, and I will claim my sheep from their hands; and I will turn away from them so that they may not pasture my sheep and the shepherds shall no longer give pasture*. For when I say: "Let them pasture my sheep," they give pasture to themselves and not to my sheep. Therefore *I will turn away from them so that they may not pasture my sheep*.

How does the Lord turn away from them to keep them from pasturing his sheep? *Do whatever they tell you, but do not follow what they do*. It is as if he said: "The words they say are mine, but their deeds are their own." If you do not follow the example of the bad shepherds, they are not giving you pasture. But if you do what they say, it is I who am feeding you.

### **Thursday in the 25<sup>th</sup> Week of Ordinary Time**

*I shall lead them forth from the Gentiles, and I shall gather them from foreign lands; I shall bring them into their own land, and I shall feed them on the mountains of Israel*. It was God who brought forth the mountains of Israel, that is to say, the authors of the divine Scriptures. Feed there that you may feed in safety. Whatever you hear from that source, you should savor. Whatever is foreign to it, reject. Hear the voice of the shepherd, lest you wander about in the mist. Gather at the mountains of holy Scripture. There, are the things that will delight your hearts; there, you will find

nothing poisonous, nothing hostile; there the pastures are most plentiful. There, you will be healthy sheep; you will feed safely on the mountain of Israel.

*And I shall feed them in streams and in every inhabited place in the land.* From the mountains which we have shown you, there have issued the streams of the gospel message because *their voice has gone forth into the whole world*, and every habitable place has become pleasant and fertile for the grazing sheep.

*In good pastures and on the high mountains of Israel, I shall feed them. And their grazing ground shall be there*, that is, the place where they will rest, where they will say: "I am happy"; where they will say: "It is true, it is clear, we are not deceived." They will find rest in the glory of God, when they find rest in those grazing grounds. *And they will sleep*, that is, find rest, *and they will rest in good pleasures.*

*And they will be fed in rich pastures on the mountains of Israel.* I have already spoken of the mountains of Israel, the good mountains to which we raise our eyes and from which may come our help. But our help is from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. Let us not then place our hope in the good mountains themselves, but let us rely on his word which says: *I will feed my sheep on the mountains of Israel.* Let us not merely remain on the mountains themselves, for he added immediately: *I will feed my sheep.* Raise your eyes, therefore, to the mountains, whence your help comes; but take note that he says: *I will feed.* For you help is *from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.*

He concludes by saying: *And I will feed them with judgment.* Observe that he alone so feeds the sheep, in feeding them with judgment. For what man can judge rightly concerning another? Our whole daily life is filled with rash judgments. He of whom we had despaired is converted suddenly and becomes very good. He from whom we had anticipated a great deal suddenly fails and becomes very bad. Neither our fear nor our hope is certain.

What any man is today, that man himself scarcely knows. Still in some way he does know what he is today. What he will be tomorrow, however, he does not know. Hence the Lord, who assigns to each what is owed to him, feeds his sheep with judgment, giving some things to one group, other things to another, and to each his due. For he knows what he is doing. With judgment he feeds those whom he, being judged himself, redeemed. Therefore, he himself feeds his sheep with judgment.

## Friday in the 25<sup>th</sup> Week of Ordinary Time

Christ is your shepherd and judge; he judges between his own sheep and other sheep. *My sheep, he says, hear my voice and follow me.*

In this statement I find that all good shepherds are one in the one shepherd. It is not that good shepherds are lacking; they are there in the one shepherd. When we speak of "many" we refer to those who are divided from each other. Here only one is spoken of, because in this passage unity is commended. The reason why shepherds are not mentioned here, but only one shepherd, is not because the Lord has failed to find anyone to whom to entrust his sheep; he entrusted the sheep to Peter because he had found Peter. Indeed, in the case of Peter he also commended the unity of the flock. there were many apostles, and yet to one only did he say: *Feed my sheep*. Do not imagine that there will be no more good shepherds, or that we shall find them lacking, or that the Lord's mercy will not produce and establish them.

Certainly, if there are good sheep there are also good shepherds; good sheep give rise to good shepherds. But all good shepherds are one in the one good shepherd; they form a unity. If only they feed the sheep, Christ is feeding the sheep. The friends of the bridegroom do not speak with their own voice, but they take great joy in listening to the bridegroom's voice. Christ himself is the shepherd when they act as shepherds. "I feed them," he says, because his voice is in their voice, his love in their love.

When he entrusted his sheep to Peter as one person to another, Christ chose to make Peter one with himself. He wanted to entrust him with the sheep in such a way that he himself might be the head and Peter might represent the body, that is, the Church. As bridegroom and bride, Christ and the Church were to be two in one flesh.

Accordingly, what does he say before he entrusts the sheep to Peter as to someone who is not separate from himself? *Peter, do you love me? He answered: I love you. And again: Do you love me? He answered: I love you. And a third time: Do you love me? He answered: I love you.* He receives an assurance of love in order to establish unity. Christ is the one shepherd who is one with the other shepherds, and in whom they themselves are one.

Shepherds are not mentioned, but they are not passed over. Shepherds have cause for pride, but *if anyone boasts it should be in the Lord*. This means that Christ should be the shepherd, that they should be shepherds for Christ, shepherds in Christ, not shepherds for themselves, apart from Christ. When the prophet said: *I will feed my*

*sheep*, it was not because of a lack of shepherds, as though he were foretelling those evil times to come and saying: "I have no one to whom I can entrust my sheep." At a time when Peter himself, and the apostles too, were alive in the body, Christ, the one in whom alone all are one, said this: *I have other sheep that are not of this sheepfold; I must bring them in as well, so that there may be one flock and one shepherd.*

All shepherds should therefore be one in the one good shepherd. All should speak with the one voice of the one shepherd, so that the sheep may hear and follow their shepherd; not this or that shepherd, but the one shepherd. All should speak with one voice in Christ, not with different voices. *Brethren, I beg all of you to say the same thing, and to have no dissensions among you.* the sheep should hear this voice, a voice purified from all schism, freed from all heresy, and so follow their shepherd, who says: *My sheep hear my voice and follow me.*