



# Christian Education

A series of Sermons and Occasional Papers  
From the clergy and members  
of Holy Trinity Church  
Forbes Park, Makati

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Title: **"Pastoralia"**  
Comment: *On 'Good Shepherd Sunday', Fr Strand reflects on shepherds who are outstanding in their field.*  
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## Readings for this Sunday:

First Reading	Acts 6: 1-9, 7: 2a,51-60
Epistle	1 Peter 2: 19-25
Gospel	John 10: 1-10

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It used to be that the second Sunday after Easter was known as "Good Shepherd Sunday" and it contained the Gospel reading we have just heard. The new lectionary shifts it to today, but the theme is still there: Christ as the Good Shepherd of the Church. The Psalm, the Epistle and the Gospel all contain this theme, and we have hymns that continue this image even further.

A few years ago when we were still the cathedral of the diocese, I was given an Igorot elder's stick that I tried to introduce as an alternate to the bishop's crosier or staff, when he visited. I learned however that no bishop wanted to use it since it identified him as an old man! I had better luck in Germany back in the 80's when someone gave our Frankfurt parish an actual German *Schäferstock*, or shepherd's staff that the bishop really did use when he visited. Far from the graceful curved wand of a more traditional shepherd's crook, this thing really did look like a practical tool and had a wicked sharp spike at one end. It was the instrument of a real worker doing a tough job.

In the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, for example, all the talk about "leading beside still waters," and "rod and staff comforting me" is treated like a bedtime story, but it's a life and death

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prospect for sheep. If we remember that when the psalm was written, "the Lord" meant not the gentle Jesus, but the Lord God Jehovah- the same one who went to war against Israel's enemies and whose wrath was furious to behold. It was only later that the Church saw the connection between "God the Lord" and "Jesus the Lord." We have called Jesus the Lord ever since, but often without realizing the power, the authority and the might of that title. It is something to bear in mind when we get stuck on pictures of a very effete Jesus holding baby lambs today.

Most of us, as I've said, do not have access to real-life examples of this image of the shepherd in its original version, but we do experience the "second generation" in the persons of those who minister to the flocks that make up the churches of God throughout the world. It's not for nothing that they are often known as "pastors," a word straight from the pasture, not the seminary. And the skills and abilities that are needed by such folk are curiously similar to those required by the farmhands who have first call on that name. We both have lonely jobs in sometimes dangerous circumstances with oftentimes problematical members of the flock.

I have been thinking long and hard about this as the Roman Catholic world approaches the election of a new pope this week, and as journalists are falling all over themselves to second-guess who the next successor to Peter will be. We of the Anglican world may not be as immediately affected, but even non-catholics must appreciate the power and authority wielded by the bishop of Rome. His "pastoral" oversight puts even the role of the Archbishop of Canterbury into perspective, doesn't it? And whoever is named will affect us, for good or ill, since we are all part of the Body of Christ on earth, whatever our political divisions, and the majority of our neighbors will be Catholics for the foreseeable future in this country.

The abilities and sensitivities needed by a new pope are being debated. Suggestions include the need to understand of the Global South (what we used to call the Third World) and the fact that Christianity is growing faster there than anyplace else. Others say that global poverty must be addressed, or the epidemics of AIDS and other communicable diseases. American Catholics are quick to point out the unrealized opportunities to address the role of women in the Church, or the option of

married clergy and the rights of gay Christians (although our own problems in that last one may have warned the Roman church away from it!) What I think is often forgotten in this “wish list” of what the new pope ought be is the fact that he must first and foremost be a shepherd, and that in that role he must personify the Good Shepherd spoken about in today’s Gospel.

What is certainly true is that whoever becomes the leader of the world’s Catholics is in for a rough ride since he will never be able to satisfy the demands of everyone, and is sure to disappoint many who have been waiting for the end of the last pontificate to affect radical changes in the policy of the Roman Church.

This disappointment people feel- the almost impossible demands they have upon the sanctity and the skills of their church leaders- is part and parcel of being a pastor in whatever capacity: the bishop of Rome or a local parish priest. The original St Peter knew that, and begins today’s epistle reading with the sad but true comment, “The merit, in the sight of God, is in bearing punishment patiently when you are punished after doing your duty.” Every clergyperson I know has been the victim of false and sometimes vicious accusations. Misery may love company, but the role of target is not one of the perks of the job of the clergy.

But the role of the shepherd remains a vitally important one for the church. Our bishops exercise this in a special way; that is the reason that they carry the shepherd’s staff as a sign of their role in the Christian community. But all who serve God in an administrative and teaching capacity share this work: all of us who are “pastors” and try in our often very flawed way, to continue the presence of the great Good Shepherd for His people. Just as the flocks follow these delegated shepherds, so the shepherds themselves follow Him who is the way, the door, and the one whose voice the sheep recognize.

St Catherine of Siena, a great Christian of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, whose feast day the Church keeps on Friday of next week, wrote this about following the shepherd:

"It is as if this gentle loving Word...were saying to you: 'Look, I have made the road and opened the gate for you with my blood. Do not fail, then, to follow it. Do not sit down to rest out of selfish concern for yourself, foolishly saying you do not know the way. Do not presume to chose you own way of serving instead of the one I have made for you in my own person, eternal Truth, incarnate Word, the straight way hammered out with my own blood.' Get up then, and follow him, for no one can come to me the Father except through him. He is the way and the gate through whom you must enter into me, the sea of peace." (*Catherine of Siena, The Dialogue.*)

May God grant to all the sheep of Christ's flock, and to the pastors into whose hands He commits them, the grace to follow first that Good Shepherd who came "that they may have life and have it to the full."