

Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

After decades of research a profile of the perfect pastor has been developed. He preaches exactly 15 minutes or is that 30 minutes, and covers all the great truths of the faith in a way that the smallest child can understand. He courageously condemns sin, but never rubs anyone the wrong way. He works from 8 in the morning until midnight, yet still spends plenty of time with his family. He works for below average wages, but wears good clothes, drives a respectable car, and is generous in his support of the church. He has the energy of a 20 year-old, but has 40 years of experience. He is gentle and handsome, loves to work with people of all ages, and is equally gifted in all areas. He is never thrown off message by those who complain. He tells the funniest stories during his sermons. He makes umpteen calls a day on hospital patients and shut-ins, yet is always available in his office when you need him.

Do you know anyone who fits that description? I don't.

Truth be told, there is no such thing as a perfect pastor. I know a quite a few pastors. I work with Pastors. I am one. Not one of us is perfect. Pastors fall prey to temptation. Pastors can say things that don't make sense. Pastors can respond to complaints in ways that seem inappropriate. Pastors are sinners.

One of the aspects of my office as a district president is that I get to see pastors and people at their best, while I also get to see pastors and people at their worst. Relationships break down. People are turned off. Pastors burn out. It is the nature of sin. It is the nature of our sinful selves. Pastors and people alike we understand the struggles of St. Paul, *"I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out."* (Romans 7:18)

The only place where pastor and people can come together is the place where God reconciles Himself to this sinful world. We have stood there. We have all knelt there. We have wept there recognizing that the nails, the crown of thorns, the torments, and the forsakenness is what each of us deserves because of our own sin. That is true for people. That is true for pastors. The cross is a place for confession. The cross is a place for repentance. The cross is the where God satisfies His wrath against our sin. The cross is the place where God makes peace with sinful mankind.

That is a message not merely to be proclaimed from the pulpit or administered in the Sacraments. That message, that forgiveness, is a blessing that our Lord Jesus wants us to live out in our relationships with each other. Remember the example of the Apostle Paul? As conflicted as the Corinthians were, he says, *"To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours."* (1 Corinthians 1:2) To the same Corinthians who were questioning Paul's credentials as an apostle, Paul writes, *"This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God."* (1 Corinthians 4:1)

Notice who is central in each of those passages? Our Lord Jesus Christ. To our pastors I say, be faithful to your calling. Have you looked at your ministry as it is define in the Supplement to the Diploma of Vocation lately? Love God's people as our Lord Jesus Himself does. To God's people I say, honor the one whom our Lord has place in your midst as His own representative. He stands before you, as our liturgy says, *"in the stead and by the command of our Lord Jesus Christ."* To pastors and people together, as sinners and saints together, remember Paul's words to the Colossians 3:12ff:

*Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, <sup>13</sup>bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. <sup>14</sup>And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. <sup>15</sup>And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. <sup>16</sup>Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual*

*songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. <sup>17</sup> And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

Sometime this month let your pastor(s) know how much you appreciate their service in your midst! The office they fill is instituted by our Lord Jesus Himself. The message they proclaim comes from the Word of God. The Sacraments that they administer are pure forgiveness.

Stand together at the foot of the cross people and pastor together.

May our Lord bless!  
Rev. Dr. John C. Wille  
South Wisconsin District President