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They are strange men in strange clothes. They stand up and say things like *In the stead and by the command of Christ, I forgive you all of your sins. I baptize you...this is my body...this is my blood...* who does these guys think they are in their collars and their vestments? These guys who say this stuff, these are pastors, and they have the very authority of Christ Himself. They serve in God's place with the authority of Christ Himself as His direct apostolic ambassadors. But it is not about them...it's about Jesus and your salvation.

It is in the pastoral office that Jesus is brought to you. It is by the pastoral office that you are baptized, absolved, communed; that you hear the word of God preached and receive the sacraments administered. It is not about some job, it's not about a paycheck, and it is certainly not about some personality cult. Rather the pastoral ministry is how Jesus gets to you; how, as Jesus says, the **kingdom of God has come near to you**. Our salvation is not abstract, it is through means—through His Church and therefore Her pastors. God distributes salvation through the work of the pastoral office, which is the very office of Christ Himself, and not otherwise. You cannot be saved without the Church and you cannot have the Church without Pastors. Though it stings our modern American ears, and though they are sinners, pastors are necessary for salvation. And in the first century, one of those pastors was a man named Titus.

Titus was a man who was born in the land of Crete and into a life of idolatry. Tradition teaches us that he was raised in Crete as a non-Christian but found himself as one of the 72 disciples sent by Jesus in our Gospel and even ended up in Jerusalem on Pentecost where the Spirit spoke through the Apostles in many

tongues to many peoples. And the Scriptures teach that one of those languages they spoke was itself the Cretan language (Acts 2:11). Tradition tells us that Titus himself was there on that fateful day of Pentecost and we know from Scripture that Titus eventually became a disciple of Paul and the pastor of the Church in Crete. Titus was granted apostolic authority to shepherd the Church of God in the stead and by the command of Christ—to baptize, commune, absolve. We hear much of Titus throughout the New Testament and we even know him as the man who received that pastoral epistle from Paul. One of Paul's most reliable companions, we get a pretty clear picture of him in the new testament. Titus was a pastor. Until he was sent back to Crete so that he might **put what remained into order**, we see his faithful and tireless work with Paul as they traveled together establishing churches.

Regardless of how many things Titus teaches us, one thing rises above the rest and that is the seriousness of the pastoral office. Also that this seriousness is twofold...Titus shows us that there is a seriousness of the office itself and the seriousness in which others should regard that office.

First the Seriousness of office itself.

The office of pastor proceeds from the person of Christ Himself and not as some pragmatic human arrangement, but a divine institution. Christ mediates our salvation through His pastors and this is the way He has chosen to bring salvation to you.

And similar to this salvation you received, the pastoral office is not validated from you and it does not originate from the laity. It is validated by Christ and it is pre-

existent to laymen. Christ does not arise from the Church, Adam did not come from Eve, so also pastors do not exist just because a group of people wants to elect a leader. Do not let your democracy get in the way of your Christianity. Pastors are not elected by the people. They are not employees of the Church. They are not some hired hand. They are ordained by other pastors and are God's men placed into a parish for the salvation of souls. This is why there is such seriousness to the office of the Holy ministry. Because it is about the salvation of souls.

And this seriousness of the office means that while they are sinners, men that hold the office should be of the highest of virtue. The pastor is in no way competent on his own but the sufficiency of his office is from God. He and also you, must know that there is no higher calling than that of a shepherd of your souls. The office of pastor demands that, only by the grace of God, a man be fit to stand in the place of Christ. He must ascend to the height of the office; he cannot ask the office to descend to him.

And make no mistake, it is only by the grace of God that a pastor is in anyway able to even attempt to fill this office. I mean, look at these requirements, they're steep.

As God's steward, he must be above reproach.

The pastor must in every sense be a mirror of Christ Himself and a model for everyone. He must be devoted entirely to the example of Good living. He must set such a positive example for others that he has nothing for which he should ever be publicly ashamed. That is what **above reproach** means. But he goes on...

He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.

We could spend a whole day on each of these but we'll suffice it to say that the pastor should always be pure and holy inasmuch as no impurity ought to pollute the one who has assumed the responsibility of cleansing the hearts of others. For it is necessary that the hand that would cleanse must itself be cleansed otherwise it will soil everything that it touches because it is itself dirty. Imagine a doctor about to give you an appendectomy without first washing his hands. That would be ludicrous.

Furthermore, the pastor is called to **Pay careful attention to himself** for the sake of the flock. Because it is of this **flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made them overseers, to care for the church of God, which Jesus obtained with his own blood.** That is why the pastoral office is of such importance.

Because he is a steward of those who have been bought by the blood of Christ. Moreover, he must be **apt to teach.** Above all the necessities of his virtuous life, his doctrine and teaching must be pure.

He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

This is the ministry of the word. Pastors are called to be stewards of the word. Certainly, we don't send men to extensive amounts of training just for fun but so that they might be trained for this grave task. No one presumes to teach an art that he has not first mastered through study. It would be foolish for the inexperienced to assume pastoral authority when the care of souls is the art of arts. The pastoral office is the highest in the land. But make no mistake, those who abuse it or take it lightly will literally have hell to pay. Because it is the highest office in the land pastors will, on the last day, be judged more harshly than anyone else. Few will be able to stand. God does not judge pastors lightly.

Not only is there an intrinsic seriousness of this office but also a seriousness in how you should think about it.

As we see from our reading, Christ and His Church expect a lot out of pastors. And so should you as you keep your pastors accountable to these requirements. As wives call husbands to higher levels of virtue and masculinity, so you are called to hold your pastor accountable. Certainly, there is no one who can fulfill these duties perfectly—but it is the souls of the faithful that are on the line. He is your spiritual father...so respect him, honor him, come to confession, pray for him, speak well of him, and encourage him. **For the laborer deserves his wages** both in compensation and in honor.

Know that he is sent by God in the authority of Christ to serve you in this place and bring you the goods. As Titus was sent with apostolic authority to the land of Crete. Not to talk about himself, not to create his own personality cult, but for the salvation of that place and so that the **kingdom of God** might come near to those people through a pastor.

That is one of the reasons he wears these vestments, because he is clothed in the office and authority of Christ. These vestments that he wears cover the man so that the office might be highlighted. In these vestments, you cover up the man and get everything you need.

All you see is his head so that with his mouth he can announce to you absolution.

You see his hands so that he may commune you, baptize you, and absolve you.

And you see his feet so that he may be at your bedside, your sickbed, and your graveside as he brings you the word and the sacrament.

And this collar around his neck is not some odd fashion choice, it is his sacred shackle by which he is bound in servitude to the Person of Christ which makes him responsible and accountable to God. The pastor is the father of the spiritual estate. He must conduct himself in a paternal, Christological way—he must conduct himself, like Titus, in Christ-like love and sacrifice.

Finally, Jesus makes it very clear that **The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few...**there is no higher authority than that of the office of pastor. But there are not enough men. It used to be an assumption that one boy in every family would go to seminary. That is now of course difficult when families—for no reason—choose to have one or two kids. The Church needs pastors...there are not enough and there never have been but the Church needs pastors nonetheless to be sent into the front lines of Spiritual warfare.

Just think about only a few examples of where this has happened.

Of course, Saint Titus sent to the Cretans, who one of their own poets says are “always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons” (with friends like these...). To these heathen lands, Paul sent his son Titus.

In the 4th century, St Patrick is sent to the land of my people; a bunch of angry red- and black-haired heathens worshipping stones. Patrick is sent from hearth and home to this land that they might hear the Gospel and so that the kingdom of God would come near to them.

Then Saint Boniface. There would be no Luther if it wasn't for Boniface. Sent to Germany in the 8th century, to a people worshipping trees sent because the **The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.** One man is sent so that **the kingdom of God** would come near to them.

Following the example of these men, if your sons meet the requirements set forth by Paul, send your sons to seminary that they too may be

trained by the current generation of pastors and deployed to spiritual war in the heathen lands. Because the fact has always been that **the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.**

Let us **pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers**, like Titus **into his harvest** that these pastors may **put what remains into order** and so that a new generation may don collars and vestments and be entrusted with this office.

That they might say things like *In the stead and by the command of Christ, I forgive you all of your sins. I baptize you...this is my body...this is my blood...* because in this way, by pastors like Titus, is how God saves His people. This is the Way that the kingdom of God comes near to you.

To Him be all Glory forever and ever. Amen.