

Alumni Day 2011
Homily
Rev. Msgr. Richard J. Bozzelli
St. Mary's Seminary Class of 1993

Soon after becoming a pastor for the first time, I found myself in my office late at night, pouring over pages upon pages of financial documents. It was budget season, and I was not only trying to understand the parish's financial situation, I was trying to eliminate the negative number that kept appearing at the bottom of the spreadsheet. At the time, I agonized over a \$10,000 deficit. Now, I pray for that.

I later related the experience to a social worker friend of mine. "Be careful not to become enamored with the finances of the job," she warned me. She obviously hadn't noticed the circles under my eyes from tossing in bed as visions of deficits danced in my head. Her theory was that much of what we do as priests is immeasurable. And so, we can't always tell whether we're making a difference. She believed that many pastors got caught up in the management side of ministry, because, in management, they could see the difference they were making. They balanced the budget, they hired a staff member, they built a church. They could measure all of those things, which brought a sense of satisfaction. "Just promise me," she said, "now that you're a *pastor*, you won't forget why you became a *priest*."

I never forgot that warning. And I've always tried to keep a good balance between the demands on me as a manager and the demands on me as a minister.

In my first pastorate, I think I did an O.K. job at it. But that was a traditional scene: 320 households in a city neighborhood, a small staff, lots of time to engage parishioners, families, and the larger community.

Last year, that all changed for me. I was assigned to pastor three parishes in Glen Burnie, just outside Baltimore. I went from 320 households to 3500 households, from five staff members to fifteen, four different campuses, three pastoral councils, two turtle doves, and a partridge in a pear tree.

Now I've become a manager again.

People ask me whether I grieve the loss of my previous parish, and I respond that I grieve most the realization that I'll never have that kind of a relationship with a parish again. One in which I could so intimately form the community through my preaching and ministry and be formed by the community in our journey together. And to the extent that more and more of us are pastoring multiple parishes, that loss saddens me.

In today's gospel, Jesus contrasts the Good Shepherd to the hired hand. The Good Shepherd lays his life down for the sheep. The hired hand - who works for pay - abandons the sheep and runs when he sees the wolf coming.

Now, while I'm not about to relinquish the lucrative salary I make as a pastor, somehow I get the impression that we, as pastors, are called to be like the Good Shepherd, not the hired hand. And, if that's the case, then just who is this hired hand that Jesus talks about?

Well, maybe he's the kind of pastor that my friend warned me about. The one who has lost the sense of mystery and wonder in his ministry and has reduced his work to a series of measurable outcomes. The one who only sees fewer priests, fewer Masses, and fewer schools, so that when the big bad wolf of productivity shows up, he does the math, doubts his worth, and heads for the hills.

Ministry without mystery is nothing more than a cost-benefit analysis. It always risks being ditched the moment the wolf bears his sharp and efficient teeth. The Good Shepherd, on the other hand, recognizes that the most valuable part of our ministry is the stuff that can't be measured.

Oh, he's not foolish enough to think that he can run a parish on only a wing and a prayer. But he's willing to enter into the mystery of ministry without knowing exactly the rate of return he's getting on his investment. He's already laid his life down to become a priest, so he might as well stick around to stare down the wolf.

After all, it's not like there's a whopping bonus awaiting him at the end of the fiscal year.

Back in the day - when seminary was fun and rectors had a sense of humor - a few friends and I put on a skit about how we were going to spend the rest of our lives in seminary formation. It just seemed like, every time we turned around, someone was coming up with more for us to learn. And my guess is that today, with so many of you facing pastorates sooner than we ever dreamed - and multiple parishes sooner than you'll ever want - you're already learning much more about management, finances, and personnel than we did.

My hope, however, is that, as today's seminaries move from training *priests* to training *pastors*, we never fail to reflect on the mystery of the priesthood. And I have become convinced that the true mystery of the priesthood lies in the fact that God and we are the only ones who know what we actually do all day. And the solution to today's woes isn't that we as priests learn more and work harder in order to take up the slack.

The solution lies in our embracing the fact that the most significant things we do as priests and pastors can rarely be measured. The care of our sacramental ministry, the impact of our preaching, the witness of our prayerfulness, the wisdom of our counseling, the justice of our actions - these are the things that matter most to our parishioners. And these are the things that remain a mystery - not only to them, but even to us.

The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He has already commended his spirit into the hands of God and, so, *trusts* that he makes a difference, even if he cannot measure the outcome. He takes on the challenge of managing his communities, but never confuses the bottom line with the higher call. And he stares down the wolf, because he has entrusted himself to God.

He is the Good Shepherd because he moves beyond the measures of management and enters into the mystery of his ministry.