

St Augustine's sermon On Pastors

We are Christians as well as leaders

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 fulfil 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.

The shepherds who feed themselves

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 others 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. They Apostle himself did not seek what was given. However, he wanted the sheep to be fruitful, not sterile and unable to give milk.

Paul's example

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 need. It is true that I have learned 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 lampstand, 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 lampstand 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.

Let each one seek not what is his but what is Christ's

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 favour 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.

Be a model for the faithful

When the Lord had explained what these bad shepherds seek, he also said what they neglect. The defects of the sheep are widespread. There are a very few healthy, fat sheep – that is, those that are made strong by feeding on the truth, by God's gift making good use of the pastures – but they are not safe from the bad shepherds. Those shepherds not only do not look after the sick, the weak, the wandering and the lost, but they do as much harm as they can to the strong and sleek among the flock. Those sheep survive – by the mercy of God they survive – but the bad shepherds do what they can to kill them.

You may ask how they do this. By living badly, by setting a bad example. There was a reason why the servants of God, eminent among shepherds, were told *In everything you do*

make yourself an example to them of working for good, and Be a model for the faithful. Often even a strong sheep, seeing its leader living a wicked life, will turn from contemplation of the laws of the Lord to the behaviour of the man and say to itself, "if my leader lives thus, who am I that I should do things differently?" In that way the shepherd is killing the strong sheep: and if the strong, then what of the rest? Even if their strength did not come from his care – even if they were strong and healthy before he saw them – still he is killing him by his evil life.

I say this to your loving kindness, I say it again: even if the sheep are living strong in the word of the Lord, even if they follow what their Lord has told them: *Do what they say; but what they do, do not do yourselves*, whoever lives wickedly in the sight of the people is a murderer in so far as he is able. Let him not flatter himself that his victim is not dead. The victim is not dead but the man is still a murderer. When a man lusts after a woman then even if she remains chaste he is still an adulterer. The Lord's judgement is clear and true: *If a man looks at a woman lustfully, he has already committed adultery with her in his heart.* He has not come to her in his bedroom but in the interior bedroom of his heart he is already in the throes of passion with her.

And so it is that anyone who lives wickedly in the sight of those over whom he has authority is killing them, even the strong ones, as far as he is able. Whoever imitates him dies and whoever does not imitate him lives, but as far as he himself is concerned he is killing them all. As the Lord says, *You are killing the fattest sheep but you do not feed my flock.*

Prepare your soul for temptation

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, that is to say, its heart 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 offence 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 centre 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.

Offer the bandage of consolation

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 co-heirs 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."

On weak Christians

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.*

Welcome or unwelcome, insist upon the message

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 judgment 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 pull 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 not 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.

The church, like a vine, grows and spreads everywhere

They are straying across the mountains and the high hills, they have been scattered over all the face of the earth. What does this mean, *scattered over all the face of the earth?* That they attach themselves to earthly things, the things that glitter on the face of the earth: they love and desire them. They do not want to die and be hidden away in Christ. *Over all the face of the earth* not only because they love earthly things but because across all the earth there are sheep astray. They are everywhere, but one thing, pride, is the mother of them all, just as Christians who are spread over all the world have one mother, the Church.

So it is not to be wondered at that pride gives birth to dissension while love generates unity. The Church is the mother of all, and everywhere the shepherd in her seeks those who are

astray, strengthens those who are weak, cares for the sick and puts the broken together again. Many of them are not even known to one another, but she knows them all because she is merged with them all.

She is like a vine that has grown and sprouted everywhere. Those in love with earthly things are like sterile shoots pruned away by the grower's knife because of their sterility, cut away so that the vine should not have to be cut down. And those sterile shoots, once they are pruned away, lie on the ground and stay there. But the vine grows over all, and it knows those shoots that remain part of it, and it knows the cut-off shoots that lie next to it.

But from where they lie she calls them back, for as St Paul says of the broken branches, *God has the power to graft them back again*. Whether you speak of sheep straying away from the flock or branches cut off from the vine, God is equally able to call back the lost sheep and to graft back the lost branches: the Lord, the true vine-dresser. *They have been scattered over all the face of the earth and no-one misses them, no-one calls them back* – no-one among the bad shepherds. *No-one misses them* – that is, no man does.

Well then, shepherds, hear the words of the Lord. As I live, says the Lord God... See how he starts. It is like an oath sworn by God, calling his very life to witness. *As I live, says the Lord God*. The shepherds are dead but the sheep are safe. *As I live, says the Lord God*. What shepherds are dead? Those who have sought their own interests rather than Christ's. So what of the shepherds who seek Christ's interests and not their own? Of course there will be such shepherds, of course they will be found: there is no lack of them and there never will be.

Do what they say, not what they do

Well then, shepherds, hear the word of the Lord!" What must you shepherds hear? *Thus says the Lord God: behold, I am above the shepherds and I will call them to account for the sheep in their hands*.

Listen, sheep of God, listen and learn: God will call the bad shepherds to account for his sheep and for their deaths. As he says elsewhere in Ezekiel: *Son of man, I have appointed you as sentry to the House of Israel. When you hear a word from my mouth, warn them in my name. If I say to a wicked man, "Wicked wretch, you are to die," and you do not speak to warn the wicked man to renounce his ways, then he shall die for his sin but I will hold you responsible for his death. If, however, you do warn a wicked man to renounce his ways and repent, and he does not repent, then he shall die for his sin but you yourself will have saved your life*.

You see, brethren? Do you see how dangerous it is to keep quiet? If you remain silent, you die; and rightly. You die for your impiety and sin – it is your negligence that kills you. He who has said, *As I live, says the Lord* might have found a living shepherd – but since the shepherd was negligent, not warning those he had been given authority over, those whose sentry he was, he will die justly and the sentry will be justly condemned. But if – the Lord continues – you say "you are to die" with one I have threatened with the sword, and he does not avoid the sword and it comes and kills him, he will die in his sin but you will have set your soul free. That is why we must not keep silent – and you, even if we did keep silent, must listen to the words of the true Shepherd in holy Scripture.

Since I raised the question, let us see if he takes the sheep from the dead shepherds and gives them to good ones. I certainly see him taking the sheep from the bad shepherds: *I am above the shepherds, and I shall take my flock back from them and I shall not allow them to*

feed my flock. In this way the shepherds will stop feeding themselves. For when I say to them, "Feed my sheep," they feed themselves and not my sheep. *I shall not allow them to feed my flock.*

How does he stop them from looking after his sheep? *Do whatever they say, but do not do what they do.* It is as if he were saying, "Their words are my words but their actions are their own." When you avoid what the bad shepherds do, they are not in charge of you any more: when you follow what they say, it is my words you are following and it is I who am tending you.

I shall feed my sheep on good pasture

I shall gather them together from foreign nations and bring them back to their own land. I shall pasture them on the mountains of Israel... As the mountains of Israel, he has set up the authors of the holy Scriptures. Feed on these and you will feed in safety. Whatever you hear from them will do you good; whatever you hear from elsewhere, spit it out. Listen to the voice of your shepherd lest you lose your way and wander into the mist. Gather together on the mountains of holy Scripture. There you will find the delight of your heart: nothing poisonous, nothing strange – the richest of pastures. Simply come in good health, and feed in good health on the mountains of Israel.

...In the ravines and in every inhabited place in the land. From these mountains of Scripture flow the streams of the gospel preaching, whose *sound has gone forth into all the earth* so that every inhabited place of the earth has become a rich and fertile pasture for the sheep.

I shall feed them in good pasturage; the high mountains of Israel will be their grazing ground. There will they rest. That is, where they will say, "It is good here," where they will say, "It is true, it is clear, we are not deceived." They will take their rest in the glory of God as in their own shelters. *They will sleep and take their rest in the midst of delight.*

They will browse in rich pastures on the mountains of Israel. I have already spoken of the mountains of Israel, the good mountains, the mountains to which we lift up our eyes so that help will come to us from them. But remember, our help is from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. So to prevent us putting our hope in the mountains, as soon as he had said *I shall pasture them on the mountains of Israel* he added at once *I shall feed my sheep.* Yes, lift your eyes up to the mountains from which your help will come; but wait for him to say *I shall feed.* For your help is *from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.*

And finally he says *I shall feed them with judgement.* Note that it is he alone who feeds them with judgement. For what man can judge another man? Wherever you look, you see rash judgements. Someone we have despaired of suddenly turns round and becomes the best of people. Someone of whom we have had high expectations suddenly fails and sinks into uselessness. There is no certainty in our foreboding; there is no certainty in our love.

Take any man. What is he today? He hardly knows himself. He has some slight idea, perhaps, of what he is today, but as for tomorrow – nothing. So the Lord feeds us all with judgement, distributing what is appropriate to each of us: this to one person, that to others, to each what they ought to have, one thing to one and another to another. For he knows what he is doing. He feeds us with judgement, us whom he redeemed after he had himself been judged. So he feeds us all with judgement.

All good shepherds are in the one Shepherd

We have seen that Christ feeds you with judgement, and he distinguishes the sheep that are his from those that are not. *The sheep that are mine*, he says, *hear my voice and follow me*.

Here I see all good shepherds wrapped up in the one shepherd. It is not that there are no good shepherds but that they are all part of the one. To be many means to be divided, and so here the Lord speaks of one shepherd because it is unity that he is commending. The Lord does not avoid talking about "shepherds" in the plural because he cannot find anyone to take care of his sheep. He did find shepherds, since he found Peter – and by the very choice of Peter he commended unity. The Apostles were many and to only one of them did he say *Feed my sheep*. May it never happen that we truly lack good shepherds! May it never happen to us! May God's loving kindness never fail to provide them!

Now if there are good sheep then it follows that there are good shepherds, since a good sheep will naturally make a good shepherd. But all good shepherds are in the one Shepherd, and in that sense they are not many but one. When they feed the sheep it is Christ who is doing the feeding. In the same way the bridegroom's friends do not speak with their own voices, but when they hear the bridegroom's voice they are filled with joy. Thus it is that Christ is feeding the sheep when the shepherds are feeding them. He says "I feed" because it is with his voice that they are speaking and with his love that they are loving. For even as he gave his sheep into Peter's charge, like one man passing responsibility to another, he was really seeking to make Peter one with him. He handed over his sheep so that he himself might be the head and Peter, as it were, the body – that is, the Church – so that like a bridegroom and bride they might be two in one flesh.

Before he handed his sheep over to Peter he made sure that he would not be entrusting them to someone quite separate: *Peter, do you love me? And he responded, I love you. Again: do you love me? And he responded, I love you. And a third time: do you love me? And he responded, I love you*. He makes certain of love and gives a firm foundation to unity. He, the one shepherd, feeds the sheep in these many shepherds, and they, the many, feed them in him, the one.

Scripture is silent about shepherds and yet not silent. The shepherds boast, but *whoever boasts, let him boast in the Lord*. This is what it means for Christ to feed the sheep; this is what it means to feed the sheep for Christ, to feed them in Christ and not to feed oneself apart from Christ. When he said *I will feed my sheep* Christ did not mean "I have no-one else to give them to," as if the Prophet had foretold a bad time when there would be too few shepherds. Even when Peter and the Apostles were still walking this earth, Christ, in whom alone all are one, said *I have other sheep that are not of this flock, and these I have to lead as well so that there will be only one flock, and one shepherd*.

So let them all be in the one shepherd and speak with the one shepherd's voice, for the sheep to hear and follow their shepherd – not just any shepherd, but the one. Let all shepherds speak with one voice in him and not with separate voices: *I beseech you, my brethren: say the same thing, all of you, and let there be no divisions among you*. May that voice, cleansed of all division and purged of all error, be the voice that the sheep hear as they follow the shepherd who says: *The sheep that are mine hear my voice and follow me*.

A sermon of St Augustine

The martyrs' deaths are made precious by the death of Christ

Through such glorious deeds of the holy martyrs, with which the Church blossoms everywhere, we prove with our own eyes how true it is, as we have just been singing, that *precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints*; seeing that it is precious both in our sight and in the sight of him for the sake of whose name it was undertaken. But the price of these deaths is the death of one man. How many deaths were bought with one dying man, who was the grain of wheat that would not have been multiplied if he had not died! You have heard his words when he was drawing near to our passion, that is, when he was drawing near to our redemption: *Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.*

On the cross, you see, Christ transacted a grand exchange; it was there that the purse containing our price was untied; when his side was laid open by the lance of the executioner, there poured out from it the price of the whole wide world. The faithful were bought, and the martyrs; but the faith of the martyrs has been proved, and their blood is the witness to it. The martyrs have paid back what was spent for them, and they have fulfilled what Saint John says: *Just as Christ laid down his life for us, so we too should lay down our lives for the brethren.* And in another place it says, *You have sat down at a great table; consider carefully what is set before you, since you ought to prepare the same kind of thing yourself.* It is certainly a great table, where the Lord of the table is himself the banquet. No-one feeds his guests on himself; that is what the Lord Christ did, being himself the host, himself the food and drink. Therefore the martyrs recognised what they ate and drank, so that they could give back the same kind of thing.

But from where could they give back the same kind of thing, if the one who made the first payment had not given them the means of giving something back? *What shall I pay back to the Lord for all the things he has paid back to me? I will receive the cup of salvation.* What is this cup? The bitter but salutary cup of suffering, the cup which the invalid would fear to touch if the doctor did not drink it first. That is what this cup is; we can recognise this cup on the lips of Christ, when he says, *Father, if it can be so, let this cup pass from me.* It is about this cup that the martyrs said, *I will receive the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord.*

So are you not afraid of failing at this point? No? Why not? *Because I will call upon the name of the Lord.* How could the martyrs ever conquer, unless that one conquered in them who said *Rejoice, since I have conquered the world?* The emperor of the heavens was governing their minds and tongues, and through them overcoming the devil on earth and crowning the martyrs in heaven. O, how blessed are those who drank this cup thus! They have finished with suffering and have received honour instead.