

Back in seminary my professors had a saying they told us over & over -
“Good administration is good shepherding.”

What they meant, of course, is that shepherding a community of people
required more than 1-on-1 pastoral skills,
more than theological depth, or vision or courage.

It also meant making sure that budgets were balanced,
that vestry meetings were orderly, that communication was clear,
services started on time, safeguarding policies were followed,
and that both staff and vendors were paid fairly and on time.

The first way you care for the community as a whole, they taught us,
is by making sure the community’s common life is properly trained,
ordered, and cared for.

Good administration is good shepherding.

Good administration is good leadership.

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Today, at our annual parish meeting you’re receiving an extensive report
on the administration of our common life and ministries.

There is a lot to celebrate and give thanks for in these reports. A lot.
But you can also find in there things we need to work on,
including areas where I need to improve.

I commend to you both our celebrations and our shortcomings,
and I invite you to step forward to make our life together
even more loving, faithful, and charitable,
even more of a witness to God’s goodness
and the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

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But...for a few minutes I need to step away from the joys and health
of this parish and look outside our walls, outside our state.

I want you to remember that wisdom from my seminary professors -
that good administration is good shepherding -
and apply it in a different setting, in a larger context.

I want to ask you to apply it to this tragic situation in Minneapolis
that I know a lot of you have been grieving.

Like a lot of you last weekend,
I watched the video of federal agents
murdering Alex Pretti in Minneapolis.

I don't think I've ever seen a man be shot to death before.
I've always turned away from those kinds of videos,
out of...Respect? Revulsion?

But I watched several times as federal agents
wrestled this man to the ground and as two of them
shot him repeatedly in the back, murdering him.

And as the week went on, and the shock started to settle,
I kept thinking of that old piece of wisdom from my professors:
good administration is good shepherding.
Good administration is good leadership.

No one ever intended for Alex Pretti and Renee Good to be murdered.
Theirs were accidental deaths,
victims of federal agents who were poorly recruited,
poorly trained, and poorly supervised.

Alex Pretti and Renee Good were killed,
just like others have been beaten, tear-gassed, and pepper-sprayed,
because of bad administration, because of bad leadership.

I haven't yet summoned the Christian charity to pray
for the agents who panicked and shot those two people,
just like I haven't yet prayed for the masked agents
who occupied an American city,
armed with guns and clubs and sprays but not equipped
with discipline and restraint and the knowledge
of the rights guaranteed in our constitution.

I haven't yet prayed for them - I hope I will soon -
but I do have sympathy for these men who were set up for failure
and now have the blood of innocents on their hands.

Because they were sent out to do incredibly difficult, important,
and whether we support it or not, legal work on our behalf,
but they were not sent out with the proper training
or supervision to do it well.

Now the blood of innocents is on their hands,
but in a democratic country like ours,
some of that blood is on yours and my hands, too,
just as surely as it is on the hands of those agents
and on the hands of our leaders.

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The question I hear most often right now is,

“What can we do about all this?”

“What can we do to stop this violent, abusive behavior
being carried out by our own government?”

“What can we do to help our neighbors who are living in fear?”

These aren't rhetorical questions,

not for the people of Holy Trinity and not for the residents of Georgia.

Our parish is blessed with a lot of people who immigrated here -

or whose families did -

and many of them have told me they are frightened right now
regardless of whether they are on firm legal footing.

The rest of us need to understand this clearly -

your brothers and sisters in Christ in this parish and in this state
are frightened of our own government.

And now reports are swirling around Atlanta

that ICE agents are gathering near the airport,
preparing for some major push in the metro area.

Will it be downtown, or along Clairemont Ave.,

or Buford Hwy, or in Clarkston?

Or will the cup of violence pass over Georgia and land somewhere else?

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I don't know what we should do collectively - as a parish, as a diocese.

I know what a few of you have done and I'm so grateful for it.

But I don't know what each of you should do

as citizens of this country and as followers of Jesus.

Because first, as much as I wish otherwise,

priesthood does not give me special insight or wisdom.

Second, we are not of one mind politically,

and third, anything you do depends

on the specific circumstances that come your way.

But I feel compelled to remind all of you -

conservative and liberal, immigrant and natural-born -

that your first allegiance is not to your country or your party,

but to your savior.

Your first allegiance must always be to Jesus.

So before you act, before you speak, before you judge who is in the right,

you need to reflect on the incarnation of Jesus.

Think about the Son of God,

who came down to Earth and took on the fullness of human flesh.

Jesus took on the blessing and the burden of ALL human flesh -

men and women, immigrant and ruler, refugee and soldier,

guilty and innocent.

There is not one human being - no victim and no perpetrator -

who is beyond the reach of Jesus.

There is no human being undeserving of life or basic human dignity.

Jesus took on the totality of human flesh

so that we might know that every human life is sacred.

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Also, before you act or speak you need to consider the WISDOM of Jesus,
wisdom seen most fully in today's gospel, the Beatitudes.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn -

including the families of Alex Pretti and Renee Good,

including the families of Charlie Kirk and Brian Thompson,

including the families who don't know

where their loved ones are or if they'll ever see them again,

including federal agents who are finding themselves in situations

they were never trained to face.

Blessed are ALL those who mourn, for they WILL be comforted.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,

blessed are the merciful,

blessed are the peacemakers,

blessed are the persecuted.

God sees every one of you and God will never forget you.

Sisters and brothers in Christ,

whatever the future holds for metro Atlanta in the next few weeks,

or for the country in the next few years -

remember that the Beatitudes are not a weapon to aim

at those you think are falling short.

They are instead a mirror,

a measure for you to hold up to your own behaviors.

Your anger, your outrage, your defensiveness,
your response or failure to respond,
must be guided by this wisdom of Jesus
that he gave to his followers on that mountain.

“For love is the saber and love is the shield,
Love is the only true power we wield.”

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And finally, you need to act and speak
as one whose life has been saved
by the death and resurrection of Jesus.
You must be governed first not by ideology or tribe
but by the saving power of the Cross.

That might sound like foolishness when you look at the news,
but as Christians we hold that God has already made foolish
the wisdom of this world.

The wisdom that says the greatest power comes from the barrel of a gun,
wisdom that says the only answer to violence is more violence.

Jesus exposed those lies on the Cross
and on Easter morning showed us where ultimate power truly resides.

God chose the foolishness of the Cross to shame the wise,
chose what is weak to shame the strong,
and as followers of Jesus we are to trust completely
in the power of God to hold and heal
rather than our own power to tear down and hate.

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I know some of you are being called to speak out in the coming days.
And some of you are being called to act - to protest, to defend, to comfort.

I'm thankful to all of you who are willing to answer God's call.

Just make sure your words and actions are always rooted
in Jesus' taking on of human flesh, in the Wisdom of his teachings,
and most of all in the Death and Resurrection
of your Lord and Savior.

Amen.