

In our first reading today, we hear what is sometimes known as Paul's farewell address to the presbyters in Ephesus. It's unique in that it's his only speech given exclusively to members of the Church. Typically, we get a window into his addresses to the unconverted.

His speech provides some beautiful aspects worth meditating upon, especially for those called to leadership positions in the Church. Paul begins presenting himself as a model for the disciples to imitate. If you are going to talk the talk, you must also walk the walk.

He emphasizes the virtue of humility and fortitude. Paul was humble in that he did not lord his authority over the people, but rather served them. He was courageous in that he preached whatever was spiritually profitable, even when it was unpleasant. Love is always rooted in the truth.

He invited them to repentance, which is a change of heart and mind. It is to see themselves and the world with the mind of Christ. Ultimately, repentance is directed toward Christ. Turning away from what is not of Christ so as to embrace Christ.

After relating the qualities of good leadership, Paul turns to what awaits him in Jerusalem. He says that the Holy Spirit has been warning him that imprisonment and hardships await him. We can only imagine his temptation to be greatly anxious at this news.

In the verses that immediately follow today's first reading, we hear about a beautiful scene that after Paul finished his speech, he knelt down and prayed with them all. Luke adds that they were all weeping loudly as they threw their arms around Paul and kissed him. What a beautiful image of a shepherd with his flock! In the words of Pope Francis, Paul is a shepherd who smells like his sheep!

For us today, we can be greatly inspired by Paul's faithfulness to the Lord and love for his people. He witnessed to the love of Christ not only with his words, but also with his life. Despite all his hardships, he knew that the Lord was with him to the end.

Like Paul, may we serve others with great zeal and joy and always relate our hearts (e.g., joys, struggles, pain, discouragement, desires) to the Lord that He may comfort us. In doing so, we will fulfill what God has in plan for us just as Paul fulfilled the ministry given to him.