

4.

Of good example was his busyness.
But if some sinful one proved
obstinate,
Be who it might of high or low
estate,
Him he reproved and sharply as I
know.
There is nowhere a better priest, I
trow.
He had no thirst for pomp or
reverence,
Nor made himself a special, spiced
conscience,
But Christ's own lore, and his
apostles twelve,
He taught, but first he followed it
himself.

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The Parson



A noble example to all
Christians.

From The Canterbury Tales
By Geoffrey Chaucer
1343-1400

1.

There was a good man of religion,
too,
A country parson, poor, I warrant
you;
But rich he was in holy thought and
work.
He was a learned man also, a clerk,
Who Christ's own gospel truly
sought to preach;
Devoutly his parishioners would he
teach.
Benign he was and wondrous
diligent.
Patient in adverse times and well
content,
As he was oft times proven; always
blithe,
He was right loath to curse to get a
tithe,
But rather would he give, in case of
doubt,
Unto those poor parishioners about,
Part of his income, even of his
goods.
Enough with little, coloured all his
moods.

2.

Wide was his parish, houses far
asunder,
But never did he fail, for rain or
thunder,
In sickness, or in sin, or any state,
To visit to the farthest, small and
great,
Going afoot, and in his hand a
stave.
This fine example to his flock he
gave,
That first he wrought and afterwards
he taught;
Out of the gospel then that text he
caught,
And this figure he added thereunto-
That, if gold rust, what shall poor
iron do?
For if the priest be foul, in whom we
trust,
What wonder if a layman yield to
lust?
And shame it is, if priest take
thought for keep,
A shitty shepherd, shepherding
clean sheep.

3.

Well ought a priest example good
to give,
By his own cleanness how his flock
should live.
He never let his benefice for hire,
Leaving his flock to flounder in the
mire,
And ran to London, up to old Saint
Paul's,
To get himself a chantry there for
souls,
But dwelt at home and kept so well
the fold,
That never wolf could make his
plans miscarry,
He was a shepherd and not
mercenary.
And holy though he was, and
virtuous,
To sinners he was not impetuous,
Nor haughty in his speech, nor too
divine,
But in all teaching prudent and
benign.
To lead folk into heaven but by
stress,