Francis, the comic strip



Pope Francis listens to Msgr. Giuseppe Magrin, president of the Apostolic Union of the Clergy, during a Nov. 16 meeting at the Vatican. The pope urged the priests to strengthen a "spirituality of communion" in the church and the world by conversion, being open to the work of the Holy Spirit and welcoming to others. (CNS/L'Osservatore Romano)

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Sincere, harmonious unity is needed in the world and in the church, Pope Francis told an international association for Catholic priests.

"It's very sad when we find in a presbyterate that this unity doesn't exist," and, instead, gossip and backstabbing are the rule, he said.

"Gossip destroys the diocese, destroys unity among priests -- between themselves and with the bishop," he said.

The pope spoke during an audience Nov. 16 with participants in the international assembly of the Apostolic Union of the Clergy, a global confederation of groups promoting brotherhood and mutual support among members of the diocesan clergy whether they are bishops, priests or deacons.

"We always see the bad in other people, always," he told the priests, but extreme care must be taken so that those observations do not turn into "terrorist" attacks where one plants gossip that destroys another person, then walks away unscathed.

"If I see terrible things, I pray, or, as a brother, I talk" to the appropriate person, he said. "Please, no gossip," which is like a moth larva that "eats the fabric of the church."

"We are in great need of communion in the church and the world," he said. This "spirituality of communion" is fostered by conversion, by being open to the work of the Holy Spirit and by being welcoming to others.

The best evangelizers, he said, are the saints. Organized programs and activities are important, but it is the work of the divine through individuals and their striving for holiness that are fruitful.

That is why worldliness is so harmful in ministers, the pope said. "The temptation of spiritual worldliness" is often "hidden in rigidity; one follows the other, they are step-

sisters."

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Aiming for the ideal of holiness for an ordained minister means "following the example of the good shepherd who gives his life for his sheep."

Priests are called to be wise and faithful servants who imitate Jesus, "tie on a work apron and kneel before the lived experience of their community, to understand their history and to live the joys and pains, the expectations and hopes of the flock entrusted to them."

"We can always find the spiritual energy that is indispensable for radiating his love and joy in the world" in the sacred heart of Jesus, where one finds the "infinite treasures of mercy, tenderness and love."