Vatican



Pope Francis celebrates Holy Thursday chrism Mass in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican March 29. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)



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In a homily addressed to the Catholic priests of the world March 29, Pope Francis urged pastors to be close to their people, calling proximity "the key to mercy" and warning against "the temptation of making idols of certain abstract truths."

During the Holy Thursday morning Chrism Mass in St. Peter's Basilica, the pontiff said truth "is not only the definition of situations and things from a certain distance, by abstract and logical reasoning" but also a practice of fidelity towards people.

Truth, the pope told the world's priests, "makes you name people with their real name, as the Lord names them, before categorizing them or defining 'their situation.'"

"We must be careful not to fall into the temptation of making idols of certain abstract truths," warned Francis.

"The 'truth-idol' imitates, it dresses itself up in the words of the Gospel, but does not let those words touch the heart," he said. "Much worse, it distances ordinary people from the healing closeness of the word and of the sacraments of Jesus."

The Chrism Mass is a special liturgy held during Holy Week in dioceses across the world during which the local bishop blesses the oils that will be used in the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, ordination and the anointing of the sick throughout the year.

As part of the liturgy, priests also reaffirm their promises, affirming that they are committed to being faithful stewards of the Gospel and servants of their people.

Francis gave his homily March 29 to hundreds of priests, bishops, and cardinals in St. Peter's just before the section of the liturgy when they all reaffirmed their promises. He addressed his sermon to "brother priests of the diocese of Rome and other dioceses around the world."

The pontiff told the assembled ministers that practicing closeness to his people is one of a priest's main obligations.

"Discerning our closeness ... is not simply one more thing to do," said the pope. "In it, we either make Jesus present in the life of humanity or let him remain on the level of ideas, letters on a page, incarnate at most in some good habit gradually

becoming routine."

Francis also told the world's priests that having proximity to those entrusted to them is the key to both mercy and truth.

"We can be certain that closeness is the key to mercy, for mercy would not be mercy unless, like a Good Samaritan, it finds ways to shorten distances," said the pope. "But I also think we need to realize even more that closeness is also the key to truth."

"Can distances really be shortened where truth is concerned?" he asked. "Yes, they can. Because truth is not only the definition of situations and things from a certain distance, by abstract and logical reasoning. It is more than that. Truth is also fidelity."

Francis noted that Jesus spent the first three decades of his human life in privacy before entering into his public ministry.

"This is God’s great choice: the Lord chose to be close to his people," said the pope. "Thirty years of hidden life! Only then did he begin his preaching. Here we see the pedagogy of the Incarnation, a pedagogy of inculturation."

"A priest who is close to his people walks among them with the closeness and tenderness of a good shepherd," the pontiff added later. "In shepherding them, he goes at times before them, at times remains in their midst and at other times walks behind them."

Holy Thursday recalls Jesus' last supper before his crucifixion and is also considered by the church to mark his creation of the priesthood -- at that supper, he offered himself to his disciples, likening his body to bread to be eaten and his blood to wine to be drunk.

During the night of Holy Thursday Catholic churches around the world celebrate the Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper, in which the priest often washes the feet of his parishioners, following Jesus' example of washing his disciples' feet.

Francis is to perform a feet-washing later March 29 at Rome's Regina Coeli prison. After meeting with some of the sick detainees in the prison's infirmary, the Vatican said the pope will wash the feet of 12 men: eight Catholics, two Muslims, one Orthodox Christian, and one Buddhist.

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