Vatican

Francis, the comic strip



Pope Francis greets a baby as he arrives to pray the rosary at the Shrine of Our Lady of Divine Love in Rome May 1. (CNS/Paul Haring)

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A true bishop always stays close to his people, protecting them from "wolves" and from losing their way, Pope Francis said.

"A bishop is the one who keeps an eye out, the one who keeps watch," looking out for danger "in order to defend the flock from the wolves that come," the pope said in his homily May 4 at morning Mass in the Domus Sanctae Marthae.

Pope Francis' homily focused on the day's reading from the Acts of the Apostles (15:22-31), which recounted how the apostles sent representatives with a letter to the faithful of Antioch to clarify and reconfirm specific laws after "some of our number who went out without any mandate from us have upset you with their teachings and disturbed your peace of mind."

"Believing to be the true theologians of Christianity," this group had had no mandate and had confused the people, the pope said.

Like the apostles, today's bishops must stand with the people to defend and strengthen them in the faith, he added.

A bishop's vocation, he said, is to be a shepherd who keeps watch, which means "being engaged in the life of one's flock."

Jesus shows how clearly distinct a true pastor is "from an employee, from someone who is up for hire and doesn't care if a wolf comes and eats one" of his own, the pope said.

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"Instead, the true shepherd who keeps watch, who is engaged in the life of his flock, defends not only all his sheep, he defends each one, confirming each one and if one

leaves or goes astray, he goes looking to bring it back," he said.

The Holy Spirit has given the people of God the ability to recognize a true bishop, Pope Francis added.

How many times, the pope asked, have they heard people's complaints about a bishop being too busy to take care of his people, being a "wheeler-dealer" who gets caught up in things that have nothing to do with his mission, who always has "a guitar in hand" or "a suitcase in hand, always on the road everywhere."

"The people of God know when the shepherd is a shepherd, when the shepherd is near, when the shepherd knows how to keep watch and gives his own life for them," he said.

The pope asked people pray the Lord always provide "good shepherds" so that the church never be without "the safekeeping of shepherds; we cannot move forward without" them.