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Servers hold a tray of palliums as Pope Francis celebrates Mass marking the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican June 29, 2019. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)



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Pope Francis reminded the world's Catholic archbishops June 29 that they are called to lives of service and of taking up the burdens of their people, telling them that shepherds "do not live for themselves but for the sheep."

In a homily in St. Peter's Basilica during a special Mass for the 31 new archbishops he has appointed around the world over the past year, Francis told the prelates to never think of themselves as superior to those they serve.

"Whenever we consider ourselves smarter or better than others, that is the beginning of the end," said the pontiff.

"The Lord does not work miracles with those who consider themselves righteous, but with those who know themselves needy," the pope continued. "He is looking for people who are not self-sufficient, but ready to open their hearts to him."

"Holiness does not consist in exalting but rather in humbling oneself," Francis said later. "Holiness is not a contest, but a question of entrusting our own poverty each day to the Lord, who does great things for those who are lowly."

The pope spoke June 29 during a solemn Mass celebrating the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul, the Catholic liturgical event that recognizes the martyrdom of the two apostles and the foundation of the Roman church.

A centerpiece of the Mass was the pope's blessing of a liturgical vestment for each of the new archbishops, a long piece of woolen cloth called a pallium that signifies their role as shepherds and their ties to each other and the pope.

Two of the new archbishops present for the Mass were Americans: Washington, DC's new leader, Wilton Gregory, and the new head of the church on the island of Guam: Michael Byrnes. Among others were archbishops recently named from every part of the world, including Australia, Canada, the UK, Brazil, India, Ghana, Mexico, and Peru.

Byrnes is originally from Michigan. He was first appointed as a coadjutor archbishop on Guam by Francis in 2016, as then-Archbishop Anthony Apuron was facing a contentious canonical trial for allegations of abuse of minors.

Apuron was found guilty by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 2018. Byrnes formally took over as archbishop when Apuron lost his appeal of the decision this April.

At a reception June 28, Byrnes tied his reception of the pallium to the archbishop's duty to take his people upon his shoulders. He said that on his island more than 230 people have come forward with allegations of abuse by members of the clergy.

"It's a heavy burden to carry," said Byrnes. "And yet, at the same time … Jesus says, 'My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.'"

"Because Jesus is doing most of the work -- all of the work," the archbishop explained. "I simply have to cooperate."

"There is plenty more that needs to grow and flourish among our people," said Byrnes. "And for that … I look to the good shepherd, the one who is pulling the weight, the one who is leading people through his grace and the power of his Holy Spirit."

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The pallium is one of the oldest liturgical vestments, believed to date from the fourth century. It is a 12-inch-long band of wool decorated by crosses worn by archbishops over their vestments during Masses in their regions as a sign of their authority, particularly over dioceses in their ecclesiastical provinces.

Also attending the Mass June 29 was Orthodox Archbishop Job of Telmessos, a representative of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. At the end of the ceremony, Job and Francis prayed together at the tomb in the basilica believed to be that of Peter.

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