Vatican

Francis, the comic strip



Pope Francis is flanked by Cardinal Marc Ouellet, prefect of the Congregation for Bishops, and Cardinal Leonardo Sandri, prefect of the Congregation for Eastern Churches, Sept. 12, 2019, during an audience with bishops who were ordained over the past year and were attending a course sponsored by the two congregations. (CNS/Vatican Media)

Cindy Wooden

View Author Profile

Catholic News Service

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Vatican City — September 12, 2019
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

New bishops need to prepare for a life filled with God's surprises, with daily plans that change at the last minute and, especially, for a life dedicated to spending time with God and with the people, Pope Francis said.

"God surprises us and often likes to mess up our appointment books: prepare for this without fear," the pope told about 130 bishops attending a course for bishops ordained in the past year.

Bishops exist to make tangible God's love for and closeness to his people, the pope told them Sept. 12. "But one cannot communicate the closeness of God without experiencing it every day and without letting himself be infected by his tenderness."

Francis told the new bishops that no matter what else is going on in their lives and ministries, they must spend time in prayer.

"Without this intimacy cultivated daily in prayer, even and especially in times of desolation and dryness, the nucleus of our episcopal ministry splits apart," he said.

Without a strong relationship to God, the sower of every good seed, a bishop's own efforts will not seem worth the effort, he said, and it will be difficult to find the patience necessary to wait for the seeds to sprout.

Closeness to God also leads directly to desire for closeness to God's people, the pope said. "Our identity consists in being near. It is not an external obligation, but a requirement that is part of the logic of gift."

"Jesus loves to approach his brothers and sisters through us, through our open hands that caress and console them, through our words pronounced to anoint the world with the Gospel and not ourselves," Francis said.

A bishop cannot simply "proclaim" his closeness to the people, the pope said. He must be like the good Samaritan: seeing people in need rather than looking the

other way, stopping to help, bandaging wounds, taking responsibility for them and paying the cost of caring for them.

"Each of these requires putting yourself on the line and getting your hands dirty," Francis told the bishops.

"Being close to the people," he said, "is trusting that the grace God faithfully pours out on us and of which we are channels, even through the crosses we bear, is greater than the mud we fear."

And, he said, a simple lifestyle is part of a bishop's mission because it is the first and clearest way to proclaim with integrity that "Jesus is enough for us and that the treasure we want to surround ourselves with is made up of those who, in their poverty, remind us of and represent him."

Bishops must spend more time visiting parishes and other communities than they spend at their desks, and those visits should not be super-formal affairs, he said.

"What comes to mind are pastors who are so groomed that they seem like distilled water that has no taste," he said.They must truly listen to people, rather than surrounding themselves with "lackeys and yes men," he added.

Advertisement