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Vatican
Pope Francis walks in procession during the ordination Mass for two new bishops in St. Peter's

Pope Francis walks in procession during the ordination Mass for two new bishops in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican Oct. 17, 2021. (CNS photo/Romano Siciliani, pool)

Junno Arocho Esteves

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Vatican City — October 18, 2021
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A bishop becomes a true shepherd not by seeking power over his flock but in serving the souls entrusted to his care, Pope Francis said just before ordaining two new bishops.

"'Episcopate' is the name of a service — it is not a true episcopate without service — not an honor like the disciples wanted, one to the left and one to the right" of Jesus, the pope said in his homily Oct. 17 at the Mass in St. Peter's Basilica.

Being a bishop means "to serve and with this service you will safeguard your vocation and will be authentic shepherds in serving, not in honors, not in authority, not in power. No, in serving, always in serving," he said.

The pope presided over the ordination Mass of Bishop Guido Marini of Tortona, Italy, who had served as master of papal liturgical ceremonies since 2007, and Archbishop Andrés Gabriel Ferrada Moreira, the new secretary of the Vatican Congregation for Clergy.

During the Mass, Pope Francis anointed each new bishop with oil and gave them each the signs of their ministry: a ring that represents faithfulness to Christ's church, the miter that reminds them of their call to holiness and the crosier as a sign of their ministry as shepherd.

As is customary, the pope used the homily prescribed for the occasion by the Italian bishops' conference, but he also added a few personal words of advice to the new bishops.

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The pope reminded the bishops "to proclaim the word on every occasion: opportune and not opportune" and that their closeness to their flock must be marked by "compassion and tenderness."

"Please, do not let go of this closeness, always be close to the people, be close to God, be close to your brother bishops, be close to priests," the pope said. "These are the four kinds of closeness of a bishop."

A bishop's first task is to pray "not like a parrot" but with the heart, he said. They must also be close to their fellow bishops, even when differences inevitably arise.

"Be bishops! There will be disagreements among you, but as brothers and neighbors. Never speak ill of your brother bishops; never," the pope said.

Pope Francis told the new bishops that closeness to their priests was crucial and urged them to always be available for them.

"How often do you hear complaints when a priest says, 'I called the bishop, but the secretary told me that he has a full agenda and would receive me perhaps within 30 days,'" he said. "This is not good. If you hear that a priest has called you, call him the same day or the day after. And with this, he will know that he has a father."

Lastly, the pope said that in order to be close to their flock, the new bishops must never forget that they too "have been taken from the flock" and not from an elite selection of qualified candidates.

"May the Lord make you grow on this path of closeness, in this way you will better imitate the Lord, because he has always been close and is always close to us, and with his closeness, which is a compassionate and tender closeness, he carries us forward," the pope said.