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Pope Francis speaks to participants who attended his meeting with diocesan liturgy directors

Pope Francis speaks to participants who attended his meeting with diocesan liturgy directors at the Vatican Jan. 20, 2023. The liturgists were attending a course at the Pontifical Institute of Liturgy in Rome. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)



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Lengthy, abstract homilies are "a disaster," so preaching should be limited to 10 minutes, Pope Francis said.

Speaking off the cuff to diocesan liturgical directors Jan. 20, the pope said homilies are not academic conferences. "I sometimes hear people say, 'I went to this parish, and yes it was a good philosophy lesson, 40, 45 minutes,'" he said.

Francis encouraged priests to keep their homilies to "no more than eight to 10 minutes" and always include in them "a thought, a feeling and an image," so that "the people may bring something home with them."

Homilies are "sacramentals" to be "prepared in prayer" and "with an apostolic spirit," he said.

But, in the Catholic Church, he said, "in general, the homilies are a disaster."

The liturgical directors were in Rome to participate in a formation course on liturgy, "Living Liturgical Action Fully," at the Pontifical Institute of Liturgy.

Francis also warned against the liturgical master of ceremonies assuming too central a role during Mass. "The more hidden a master of ceremonies is, the better," he said. "It is Christ that makes the heart vibrate, it is the meeting with him that draws in the spirit."

Beyond a "deep knowledge" of religious celebrations, the pope said that experts on liturgy must have a strong pastoral sense to improve a community's liturgical life, and that religious celebrations must foster the "fruitful participation of the people of God" and not just of the clergy.

A pastoral approach to the liturgy allows religious celebrations to "lead the people to Christ, and Christ to the people," which the pope said is the "principal objective" of liturgy and an essential principle of the Second Vatican Council.

"If we neglect this, we will have beautiful rituals, but without vigor, without flavor, without sense, because they do not touch the heart and the existence of the people of God," said Francis.

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The pope encouraged them to spend time in parishes, observe liturgical celebrations and help pastors reflect on how they prepare liturgy with their communities.

If teachers of liturgy are "in the midst of the people, they will immediately understand and know how to accompany their brothers and sisters, how to suggest what is suitable and feasible to communities, and what the necessary steps are to rediscover the beauty of the liturgy and celebrating together," he said.

The job of a diocesan liturgical director, said Francis, is to offer parishes a liturgy "that is imitable, with adaptations that the community can take to grow in liturgical life."

A liturgical director should not care about a parish's liturgy only when the bishop comes to visit and then let the liturgy go back to how it was after he leaves, the pope said.

"To go to parishes and not say anything when faced with somewhat sloppy, neglected, poorly prepared liturgies means not helping the community, not accompanying them," he added.