Vatican
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A older white man with a beard and glasses wears a brown tunic and red zucchetto and stand

Cardinal Raniero Cantalamessa, preacher of the papal household, presents a Lenten meditation for members of the Roman Curia and Vatican employees in the Paul VI hall at the Vatican Feb. 26, 2021. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)



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Vatican City — March 31, 2023
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The Vatican's decision to list the titles traditionally associated with the papacy as "historic titles" in its 2020 yearbook was the right move, said the papal preacher.

Cardinal Raniero Cantalamessa, preacher of the papal household, told officials of the Roman Curia that he noted "with joy" that only one title is listed under the pope's name: Bishop of Rome.

The other titles linked to the papacy are on the following page of the directory and are listed as "historical titles," the cardinal said in his Lenten meditation for Curia officials March 31.

"It seems right to me, especially with regard to 'Vicar of Jesus Christ,'" the cardinal said. "Vicar is one who takes the place of the boss in his absence, but Jesus Christ never made himself absent and will never be absent from his church."

The historic titles for the pope listed in the Vatican "Annuario," or yearbook, include: "Vicar of Jesus Christ. Successor of the Prince of the Apostles. Supreme Pontiff of the Universal Church. Primate of Italy. Archbishop and Metropolitan of the Province of Rome. Sovereign of Vatican City State. Servant of the Servants of God."

In January, Pope Francis told the Associated Press that if he were ever to resign he would insist on being referred to as the emeritus bishop of Rome, and he would live in a Rome diocesan residence for retired priests.

As Cantalamessa offered his meditation on Christ's enduring presence in the church, a chair reserved for Pope Francis sat empty in the front row of the Vatican audience hall. The pope had been admitted to the hospital for bronchitis March 29 and was expected to be released April 1, according to the Vatican.

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Cantalamessa warned the officials against being overly nostalgic about how the church used to be, pointing particularly to those who pine for the period following the Second World War when "seminaries and religious novitiates abounded in vocations."

"If those full seminaries had forged holy pastors, and the traditional formation imparted to them (were) solid and true, we wouldn't have to mourn so many scandals today," said the cardinal.

Realism is necessary, Cantalamessa said, but so is courage, the courage Jesus instilled in his disciples as he was about to face arrest and death.

The cardinal, a Capuchin, told the Curia officials that in 1980 when his superior allowed him to leave his teaching position to become a fulltime preacher, he came to St. Peter's Basilica to pray.

"At a certain point, while I was in the square, the word of God came forcefully back to my mind. I turned toward the pope's window in the Apostolic Palace and began to proclaim aloud: 'Take courage, John Paul II, take courage, cardinals, bishops and all the people of the church, and work because I am with you, says the Lord,'" he said.

The cardinal said he was not embarrassed. "It was raining and there was no one around."

"Today I dare to proclaim that word again, knowing that it is not just a quotation, but an ever-living word that always does what it promises. 'Courage, therefore, Pope Francis! Courage, fellow cardinals, bishops, priests and faithful of the Catholic Church, and work, because I am with you, says the Lord.'"