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Bishops must stand firm in truth to lead people to Christ, pope says

by Carol Glatz by Catholic News Service

Vatican City — In their task of leading people to the light of Christ, bishops must have the courage to face opposition and peacefully stand firm in the truth, Pope Benedict XVI said.

Meeting the approval of the wider public "is not the criterion to which we submit. Our criterion is the Lord himself," the pope said Sunday as he celebrated the feast of the Epiphany of the Lord with a Mass in St. Peter's Basilica.

"The fear of God frees us from the fear of men. It liberates," he said.

During the three-hour ceremony, the pope also ordained four new archbishops, including his longtime secretary, Archbishop Georg Ganswein, 56, who became prefect of the papal household, a job that involves organizing the pope's daily round of audiences and meetings.

The four men swore their fidelity to the Gospel and to the church and laid prostrate on an ornate rug on the floor of St. Peter's Basilica as the Litany of Saints was chanted. Then they knelt before Pope Benedict, who laid his hands on their heads and ordained them bishops.

He anointed their heads with chrism oil, gave them the book of the Gospels, slipped a ring on their fingers and gave each a miter and pastoral staff.

In his homily at the Mass, the pope looked at the figure of the Three Kings, the wise men who set out from the East in search of Jesus; the pope drew comparisons between them and the mission to which the new bishops are called.

Like the Magi, he said, the bishop, too, must not be content with his position, but want to be "seized by God" and "gripped by God's concern for men and women."

Prayer, in fact, helps "detach us from our false sense of security, from our being enclosed within material and visible realities" and gives "us a restlessness for God and thus an openness and concern for one another."

Like the wise men, who probably were scorned or ridiculed for following a star in search of the promised king, a bishop must know that seeking the truth is more important than "the taunts of the world, so apparently clever."

"The humility of faith, of sharing the faith of the church of every age, will constantly be in conflict with the prevailing wisdom of those who cling to what seems certain," he said.

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But a bishop, who must guide today's men and women to the way of faith, hope and love, must have "the courage to contradict the prevailing mindset" of agnosticism, which is "extremely intolerant regarding anything that would question it and the criteria it employs."

However, "this courage or forcefulness does not consist in striking out or in acting aggressively, but rather in allowing oneself to be struck and to be steadfast before the principles of the prevalent way of thinking."

"We are not provocative; on the contrary we invite all to enter into the joy of that truth which shows us the way," the pope said.

By defending the Lord's cause, the church inevitably will stir up opposition, but it also will "constantly gain others to the way of the Gospel," he said.

The other men the pope ordained were Italian Archbishop Angelo Zani, 62, the new secretary of the Congregation for Catholic Education; Nigerian Archbishop Fortunatus Nwachukwu, 52, nuncio to Nicaragua; and French Archbishop Nicolas Henry Thevenin, 54, nuncio to Guatemala. The nuncios as the Holy See's ambassadors abroad and serve as liaisons with the local Catholic communities.

Along with the Sistine Chapel choir, singers from the Palestrina Choir of St. Mary's Pro-Cathedral in Dublin, provided music for the Mass.

After Mass, an Italian folklore association sponsored an Epiphany parade featuring drummers, flag twirlers and men and women in Renaissance costumes. The parade ended with the arrival on horseback of the Magi in St. Peter's Square.

In his midday Angelus address to thousands of people in the square, the pope offered special prayers for Eastern Christians celebrating Christmas on Monday in accordance with the Julian calendar.

He also tweeted a message from his eight different @Pontifex Twitter accounts saying, "The Wise Men followed the star and reached Jesus, the great light that illuminates all of humanity."

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