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Francis: Priests should 'have the smell' of their people

Joshua J. McElwee | Mar. 28, 2013 The Francis Chronicles

Pope Francis urged the world?s Catholic priests Thursday to focus not on introspective prayers, but on walking among the common faithful so as to be ?shepherds who have the smell of their sheep.?

?It is not in soul-searching or constant introspection that we encounter the Lord,? Francis said during his homily at the annual Holy Thursday morning chrism Mass in St. Peter?s Basilica.

?Self-help courses can be useful in life, but to live our priestly life by going from one course to another, from one method to another, leads us to become pelagians and to minimize the power of grace, which comes alive and flourishes to the extent that we, in faith, go out and give ourselves and the Gospel to others,? the pope continued.

The chrism Mass, held in dioceses across the world during Holy Week, sees the local bishop blessing the oils that will be used in the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, ordination and the anointing of the sick throughout the year.

Normally attended by local priests and members of religious orders, Thursday?s morning Mass at the Vatican was concelebrated by more than 2,000 cardinals, archbishops, bishops, and priests.

Francis remarks for the occasion seem to speak directly to the clerics present with him.

Beyond encouraging clergy to ?have the smell? of their people, the pope also asked they ?be for? others, and to remember that the finery used in liturgical celebrations ?is not so much about trappings and fine fabrics.?

?When we put on our simple chasuble, it might well make us feel, upon our shoulders and in our hearts, the burdens and the faces of our faithful people, our saints and martyrs, of which we have so many in our times,? Francis said.

?The beauty of all these liturgical things ... is not so much about trappings and fine fabrics,? the pope continued.

?The ointment, dear brothers, is not intended just to make us fragrant, much less to be kept in a jar, for then it would become rancid ? and the heart bitter.?

Following the morning Mass, Francis visited a Rome-area youth detention center, where he washed the feet of twelve of the detainees. Included in the group were two girls and two Muslims. After washing each person's feet, Francis also kissed them.

[Joshua J. McElwee is an *NCR* staff writer. Follow him on Twitter at **twitter.com/joshjmac** [1].]

For a copy of the pope's full homily Thursday morning, see the transcript at the Vatican website here [2].

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