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Francis laments injustices of a penal system

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Speaking off-the-cuff Wednesday to a group of prison chaplains, Pope Francis lamented the injustices of a system in which it is "easier to punish the small fry, but let the big fish swim free in the water."

His remark came as he met with approximately 200 Italian prison chaplains, whose ministry he called "very challenging and very important."

Francis began his remarks by asking the chaplains to bring his greetings to the prisoners whom they serve, according to a Vatican Radio report [1].

"Please say that I pray for them," Francis said. "I pray to the Lord and Our Lady that they can successfully overcome this difficult period of their lives. That they not be discouraged, that they do not quit." He said the prisoners should be told that the Lord is with them in the prisons and in their cells.

Pope Francis also assured the chaplains of his prayer, saying their ministry "is not easy."

"You are a sign of Christ's nearness to these brothers who are in need of hope," he said. "Recently you talked about a 'justice of reconciliation' [at their conference], but also a justice of hope, of open doors, of horizons. This is not a utopia: It can be done."

"It is not easy, because of our weaknesses which are everywhere, also the devil is everywhere, temptations are everywhere," Francis said. "But you must always try."

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[1] http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2013/10/23/pope_francis:_unfair_big_fish_escape_punishment/en1-739847