NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Authority in preaching comes from loving like Jesus did, pope says

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Vatican City

The authority of Jesus' teaching seemed "new" to the people of his day, not because of its content, but because of the love and respect with which Jesus spoke, Pope Francis said.

Jesus "wanted the people to draw near and seek him, and he was moved when he saw them like sheep without a shepherd," the pope said Tuesday in the homily at his early morning Mass.

The day's Gospel reading, describing Jesus preaching in the synagogue at Capernaum, said the people were astonished by his preaching, which to them was "a new teaching with authority."

Jesus' authority came from "the power of holiness" and the novelty of his teaching came from the fact that he transmitted "the love of God for each one of us," the pope said, according to a summary by Vatican Radio.

Jesus "draws near to the people so they can draw near to him; he is close to sinners," the pope said. He forgave the adulterer and "talks theology with the Samaritan, who wasn't a little angel."

"He seeks people's hearts and draws near to people's wounded hearts," Pope Francis said. The Lord had only two interests: "the person and God."

The people of Capernaum were used to hearing the Scribes preach, the pope said. They taught and preached, but they placed so many requirements, so many "heavy things on their shoulders that the poor people couldn't move."

The Scribes and Pharisees basically "beat the people down, didn't they? 'You have to do this and this and this,'" he said. "Many people think the faith is like this."

The day's first reading, from the First Book of Samuel, tells how the priest Eli at first belittles Hannah, who is weeping and begging God for a child.

Eli "was a representative of the faith, a faith leader, but his heart wasn't in the right place and he disrespected this woman," the pope said. "How many times do the people of God feel unwanted by those who should be giving a witness -- by Christians, lay Christians, priests, bishops?" the pope asked.

He also spoke about Eli's sons, who were "priests, but brigands," because they were focused on money and power. "They exploited the people, profiting from their alms and gifts."

"The Lord punished them heavily," he said, because they were corrupt, which should serve as a warning to "laity who are corrupt, corrupt priests, corrupt bishops, who profit from their situations and the privileges of faith and being Christian."

Such people, Pope Francis said, "are traitors" like Judas, who betrayed Jesus.

Pope Francis prayed that Christians would learn "not to be pure legalists, hypocrites like the Scribes and Pharisees; to not be corrupt like the sons of Eli; and to not be lukewarm like Eli."

Instead, he said, Christians should imitate Jesus "with zeal for seeking people out, healing them, loving them."

Source URL (retrieved on *09/23/2014 - 22:04*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/francis-chronicles/authority-preaching-comes-loving-jesus-did-pope-says