

HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE
OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE



BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIEGE
PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLS

BOLLETTINO

SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE

N. 160909a

Friday 09.09.2016

The Pope to bishops of the mission territories: the Church is called to be above tribal and cultural connotations

“Each one of you has the great privilege, and at the same time the responsibility, of being at the vanguard of evangelisation”, said Pope Francis this morning to the prelates participating in the updating seminar for bishops in mission territories, organised by the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples. “Coming to Rome in this Holy Year of Mercy, you join the many pilgrims from all over the world. This experience is very good for us: it makes us aware that we are all pilgrims of mercy, and we are all in need of the grace of Christ to be merciful like the Father. ... Every bishop experiences first-hand this reality and, as a vicar of the ‘great shepherd of the sheep’, is called to express in his life and in his episcopal ministry God’s paternity, goodness, care, mercy, and the gentleness and authority of Christ, Who came to give His life and to make of all men a single family, reconciled in the love of the Father”.

The Holy Father recalled that the bishops’ places of origin, diverse and far from each other, belong to the great constellation of so-called “mission territories”. As they are in the first line of evangelisation, they are called upon “to care for the flock and to go in search of sheep, especially those that are far away or lost; to seek out new ways of proclaiming, to reach out to people; to help those who have received the gift of Baptism to grow in faith, so that believers, even those who are lukewarm or not practising, may discover anew the joy of faith and evangelising fruitfulness. Therefore, I encourage you also to encounter those sheep that do not yet belong to Christ’s fold: indeed, evangelisation is essentially connected to the proclamation of the Gospel to those who do not know Jesus Christ or have always rejected Him”.

“In missionary work you are able to call upon various collaborators. Many lay faithful, immersed in a world marked by contradictions and injustices, are willing to seek the Lord and to bear witness to Him. It is up to the bishop, first and foremost, to encourage, accompany and stimulate all the attempts and all efforts made to keep hope and faith alive. The young Churches of which you are Pastors are characterised by the presence of a local clergy, often numerous, but at times scarce, indeed meagre. In any case, I invite you to pay attention to the preparation of presbyters in the seminary years, without neglecting to accompany them in their continuing formation after ordination. Know how to offer them a concrete and tangible example. As far as possible, seek to participate with them in the main formative moments, always considering the personal dimension too”.

“Do not forget that for the bishop, the closest of the close is the presbyter. Every presbyter must be aware of the

closeness of his bishop. When a bishop receives a telephone call from a priest, or a letter, he must answer immediately, immediately! The same day, if possible. But that closeness must begin in the seminary, in formation, and continue”.

“The dynamism of the sacrament of the Order, the vocation itself and the Episcopal mission, like the duty to observe carefully the problems and practical questions of the society to be evangelised, require that every bishop tend towards the fullness of maturity in Christ. Also through the witness of one’s own human, spiritual and intellectual maturity, focused on pastoral charity, may Christ’s charity and the Church’s care for all mankind shine ever more brightly in you”.

Francis concluded by exhorting the bishops to pay close attention to what can be done to favour evangelisation, and to ensure that the various pastoral activities they promote are not damaged or inhibited by divisions, either already present or that may be created. “Division is the weapon the devil employs most to destroy the Church from within”, he explained. “He has two weapons, but the main one is division: the other is money. The devil enters through our pockets and destroys with the tongue, with idle chatter that divides, and the habit of gossiping is a habit of ‘terrorism’. The gossip is a ‘terrorist’ who throws a grenade – chatter – in order to destroy. Please, fight against division, because it is one of the weapons that the devil uses to destroy the local Church and the universal Church. In particular, differences due to the presence of different ethnic groups in the same territory must not penetrate into the Christian communities to the point of prevailing over their own good. These are challenges that are difficult to resolve, but with the grace of God, prayer, penance, it can be done. The Church is called to place herself above tribal and cultural connotations and the bishop, the visible principle of unity, has the task of ceaselessly building up the particular Church in the communion of all her members”.

“Care for the people God has entrusted to you, care for priests, care for seminarians. This is your task”, he concluded, invoking the help of Our Lady and asking the bishops to pray for him.
