



The Holy See

POPE FRANCISMORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
*DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHA***The closeness of bishops**

Friday, 20 September 2019

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Bishops should be close to God, to their priests, to each other and to all the People of God. Pope Francis affirmed this during Mass at Santa Marta on Friday, 20 September, as he continued the preceding day's reflection on ordained ministry. Inspired by the day's reading in which the Apostle Paul offers advice to the young Bishop Timothy, the Holy Father turned his thoughts to things that weaken the spiritual life of ordained ministers such as money, gossip and frivolous arguments. Indeed, "when a minister — whether a priest, deacon or bishop — starts becoming attached to money", he gets attached to the root of all evils, the Pope explained. (1 Tim 6:2c-12), because "the devil enters through the pockets".

Pope Francis continued by identifying four ways in which ordained ministers can achieve closeness. Firstly, he said, the bishop "is a man who is close to God", and Peter says that "prayer and the proclamation of the Gospel" is a bishop's duty. "The first task of a bishop", then, is to pray, which "gives strength" and reawakens "awareness of this gift" received. The second way in which bishops can be close is through closeness to their priests and deacons who are their collaborators and the ones closest to them. "You must first love the ones closest to you who are your priests and your deacons", Pope Francis stressed, adding that "it is sad when a bishop forgets about his priests" and delays receiving them. A priest has "a right to know that he has a father", he said. At the same time, the Pontiff urged priests to be close to their bishop.

Pope Francis then turned his attention to closeness among bishops and closeness among priests, the third path of closeness. Priests, he stressed, must be close to each other and avoid divisions because these are the work of the devil and lead to the formation of cliques based on ideologies or sympathies.

The fourth means of closeness, Pope Francis said, is the closeness of bishops and priests to the People of God. “In the Second Letter, Paul begins by telling Timothy not to forget his mother and his grandmother”, thus, the roots from which he came. And “as bishop and priest, it is always necessary to be close to the People of God”. Likewise the People of God are called to pray for their bishops and priests so that the gift that has been given to them may be safeguarded.

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