

# origins

CNS documentary service

## Speech to Priests of Rome on Mercy

Pope Francis

*In Pope Francis' annual Lenten meeting with Rome pastors, he focused on the priest's call to be a minister of mercy. Repeating his frequent call to go out into the world and meet people where they are, Pope Francis told the priests March 6 that their ministry of mercy, which reaches its highest point in the sacrament of penance, is especially needed by people who have left the church in order "to avoid showing their wounds more closely." Pope Francis urged the pastors to devote time to hearing confessions and to avoid being either very lax or very strict. "It is normal that there are differences in the style of confessors, but these differences cannot concern the essential, that is, sound moral doctrine and mercy," he said. Neither the very lax nor the very strict*

*"We all need [mercy]. ... As pastors we must extend great, great mercy!"*

*priest witnesses to Christ, because "neither one takes care of the person he encounters," he said. The rigorist "nails the person to the law, understood in a cold and rigid way; and the lax one also washes his hands of them: He is only apparently merciful, but in reality by minimizing the sin he does not take seriously the problems of that conscience." Pope Francis spoke in Italian; a Vatican translation of his speech follows, copyright © 2014 by Libreria Editrice Vaticana.*

**W**hen together with the cardinal vicar we planned this meeting, I told him that I could offer you a meditation on the theme of mercy. At the beginning of Lent it does us good to reflect together as priests on mercy. We all need it. As do the faithful also, since as pastors we must extend great, great mercy!

The passage from the Gospel of Matthew that we heard makes us turn our gaze to Jesus as he goes about the cities and villages. And this is curious. Where was Jesus most often, where could he most easily be found? On the road. He might have seemed homeless because he was always on the road. Jesus' life was on the road.

He especially invites us to grasp the depths of his heart, what he feels for the crowds, for the people he encounters: that interior attitude of "compassion": Seeing the crowds, he felt compassion for them. For he saw the people were "harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."

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