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CNS documentary service

Speech to Priests of Rome: 'Bitterness in the Life of a Priest'

Pope Francis

Confronting and not giving in to bitterness helps priests realize that they are not all-powerful beings but sinners who have been forgiven and called by God, Pope Francis said. Bitterness is "a subtle enemy" that hides and "robs us of the joy of the vocation to which we were one day called," the pope said Feb. 27 in an address to clergy of the Diocese of Rome read by Cardinal Angelo De Donatis, papal vicar of the diocese. Pope Francis was unable to attend the traditional Lenten penitential service with priests of the Diocese of Rome due to a mild cold, the Vatican said. The pope said his reflection was based on listening to the experiences of seminarians and priests of

"Bitterness — which is not a fault — should be welcomed. It can be a great opportunity. Perhaps it is even healthy because it makes the inner alarm bell ring."

various Italian dioceses and did not refer "to any specific situation." He said, "The majority of priests I know are content with their life, and they consider this bitterness to be a part of normal life, without any drama." The first cause of bitterness, he said, can be traced to problems with one's faith, for example, when a priest feels deceived by God, possibly because he replaced hope with his own expectations about priestly life. "Hope, on the other hand, is something that is born in the heart when one decides not to defend oneself anymore," he said. Another source of bitterness for priests could be problems with their bishops, he said. While blaming one's superiors is a cliché "that no longer holds," bishops too have limitations and shortcomings and there will always be problems with management or pastoral styles. Finally, a third source of bitterness can be seen in problems among priests themselves, especially in recent years when priests have "suffered the blows of financial and sexual scandals" in the church. Pope Francis spoke in Italian; a Vatican translation of his speech follows, copyright © 2020 by Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

do not intend to reflect so much on the difficulties that stem from the presbyteral mission: They are very well known and widely identified things. On this occasion, I wish to speak to you about a subtle enemy that finds many ways to disguise itself and hide, and like a parasite, it slowly robs us of the joy of the vocation to which we were one day called.

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