

11/23/14 Christ the King A

-- Pope Francis has challenged pastors and bishops around the world to make sure they have “the smell of the sheep” on them. In other words, they shouldn’t just stay in their offices and homes but be out among the people.

-- Our new bishop has already taken that to heart as he’s visiting all 15 deaneries during the first six weeks since taking office.

-- Ironically, though, there’s a smell around the Vatican he’s trying to minimize. While one set of public restrooms is being renovated, he’s having three showers installed. These will be available for the homeless and those who don’t have a place to shower.

-- And there are plenty of homeless people in Rome. On a Friday night a bit over a year ago I saw many of them being fed in the plazas leading to the Vatican. It’s a good thing they weren’t in Fort Lauderdale, where you could be arrested for feeding them outside an approved shelter.

-- In what he is doing, Pope Francis gives me a good example of what a pastor of the universal Church should be doing. And he is also trying to live out the challenge posed in the gospel today.

-- That’s not something new in his life. He did that in Argentina. And the fact that he’s the first Pope from South America seems to give him a great sensitivity to the plight of the poor and powerless.

-- When we prepare young people in our parish for the Sacrament of Confirmation, we expect them to do a certain amount of service to their family, Church and community. But this is not just a requirement they check off in order to receive this sacrament.

-- In my interviews with them I emphasize that we are trying to teach them that this is part and parcel of the lifestyle of a Catholic Christian. Serving those in need, especially the poor and powerless, is just something we all should do as a matter of course.

-- That's what our gospel is about. Those people who fed the hungry, clothed the naked, visited the ill and imprisoned, didn't think about the fact that they were doing it for Christ himself. But that is, in fact, what they were doing.

-- As we conclude this Church year, we have the opportunity to give thanks for many things during this week. It's much more than a time to get together with family and friends and celebrating a meal together.

-- It's an opportunity to be grateful that Jesus comes to us in the face of the poor, the sick, those burdened by life. It's an opportunity to remember that these are not just people who need our help, but people who show us the face of Christ.

-- During this month of November we conduct the Catholic Campaign for Human Development. You may have seen an envelope for it in your packet. The CCHD helps those who empower the poor, who seek to find them employment, who help them obtain affordable housing.

-- Supporting CCHD is one way we can try to see Christ's presence in the poor. For our aid to the poor and powerless is not simply a matter of being good citizens or community members.

-- It's a matter of finding the presence of Jesus in those who are most in need. It's not an optional exercise for those who like that kind of thing. It's an essential part of being a true follower of Christ.

-- So essential, in fact, that our life with God in eternity stands or falls on how we answer this call.

-- Answering the Pope's challenge, we all must ask whether we have the smell of the sheep who are God's poor and powerless.