

Pope Francis Rebukes Pastors Who Act Like Princes

“Jesus was not a prince,” Pope Francis stated during his General Audience. “It is awful for the church when pastors become princes, far from the people, far from the poorest people. That is not the spirit of Jesus.”

According to the pope, true followers of Jesus take up His yoke to receive and welcome the revelation of God’s mercy, bringing salvation to the poor and the oppressed. He called us to learn from Jesus “what it means to live in mercy in order to be instruments of mercy.”

The fact that the pope’s call for servant leaders is resounding in today’s news says as much about the culture as it does about the church. Clearly, Christian leaders need to be reminded regularly that we serve Jesus when we serve those in need (Matt. 25:40). Our Lord came “not to be served but to serve” (Matt. 20:28) and called us to imitate His sacrifice in loving and serving others (John 13:15).

At the same time, the pope’s call resonates today in large part because our culture is so skeptical of leadership. We have watched politicians resign from office after admitting moral failures, business leaders go to prison for corruption, and athletes face suspensions for using banned drugs. Such failures are so common that they no longer surprise us. Leaders who choose to serve with humility and public integrity seem the exception more than the rule.

But authoritarian leaders are not true leaders.

J. Oswald Sanders, in his now-classic *Spiritual Leadership*, claims that “true greatness, true leadership, is found in giving yourself in service to others, not in coaxing or inducing others to serve you.” Max De Pree, the former CEO of

Herman Miller and author of best-selling leadership literature, defines leadership this way: "The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. The last is to say thank you. In between the two, the leader must become a servant and a debtor. That sums up the progress of an artful leader."

Serving others is not only the best way to lead, it is also the best way to serve ourselves. Pete Wilson made headlines this week when the popular megachurch pastor resigned from his position, citing burnout and stress. As he noted, "Leaders who lead on empty don't lead well. For some time, I've been leading on empty." *Christianity Today* is reporting on the thousands of pastors like Rev. Wilson who will leave the ministry this year, burned out and hurting.

One of the reasons for this epidemic is that many pastors have shifted from serving people to running organizations. They lose their connection with the souls they serve and wonder why their hearts are hurting. But God feeds us when we feed each other. He gives us what we will give away.

George MacDonald encouraged us to "trust God to weave your thread into the great web, though the pattern shows it not yet." Choose to serve those you influence today and know that your Father is using your love to impact more lives than you can know.

One of the souls you bless will be your own.