



Pope Francis greets visitors as he rides the popemobile around St. Peter's Square at the Vatican before his weekly general audience Dec. 4, 2024. (CNS/Lola Gomez)

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Homilies must be prepared with the help of the Holy Spirit, be shorter than 10 minutes and put the spotlight on the Lord, not oneself, Pope Francis said.

Those who preach must convey "one idea, one sentiment and an invitation to action," he said.

Preaching loses its power and starts to ramble after eight minutes, he said to the applause of visitors gathered for his general audience in St. Peter's Square Dec. 4.

The pope continued his series of audience talks on the Holy Spirit, focusing on its role in evangelization and preaching in the church.

It was also the first general audience to include a greeting and a summary of the pope's catechesis in Mandarin Chinese. The pope gives his catechesis in Italian, and aides read summaries in English, Spanish, French, German, Portuguese, Polish, Arabic and, from Dec. 4, standard Chinese.

In his main audience talk, the pope said, "The church must do precisely what Jesus says at the beginning of his public ministry," which, according to St. Luke's Gospel, is to accept the anointing of the Holy Spirit "to bring glad tidings to the poor."

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"Preaching with the anointing of the Holy Spirit means transmitting, together with the ideas and the doctrine, the life and profound conviction of our faith. It means doing so 'not with persuasive (words of) wisdom, but with a demonstration of spirit and power,'" he said, citing the First Letter to the Corinthians.

The Holy Spirit comes to those who pray, which is the first thing a preacher must do, he said.

"Woe to those who preach without praying," he said, because they become, as St. Paul described, "a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal."

"The second thing is not wanting to preach ourselves, but to preach Jesus, the Lord," Francis said.

Often homilies are so long, 20 or 30 minutes, that people will go outside to smoke a cigarette and come back, he said.

"Please," he said, "do not go longer than 10 minutes, ever! This is very important."

"Not wanting to preach oneself also implies not always giving priority to pastoral initiatives promoted by us and linked to our own name, but willingly collaborating, if requested, in community initiatives or (those) entrusted to us by obedience," he said.

The pope asked that the Holy Spirit, "help us, accompany us and teach us" how to preach the Gospel to men and women today.