



Pope Francis on Friday told confessors that they have a special responsibility to help young people discern their vocations in life.

The Pope was talking to participants in an annual course on the Internal Forum organized by the Apostolic Penitentiary. This year, ahead of the Synod of Bishops on young people, the course is focused on the relationship between the Sacrament of Confession and discernment of vocations.

Be instruments of Reconciliation

Pope Francis told the young confessors they must understand their role as instruments of God's mercy and never seek to become "masters of people's consciences". Remembering they are only instruments of Reconciliation, he said, is not to diminish their ministry, but rather to assume a humble attitude of listening to the Spirit so that Christ can be seen clearly as our great high priest.

Secondly, he told the young men they must learn how to listen to the questions before they try to give any answers. The confessor, he said, is called to be a listener, both to the penitent and to the Holy Spirit, through whom we hear the Word of God. By listening obediently to the Spirit, he said, we can put young people in contact with Jesus himself.

Listen and learn to read signs

Every young person, the Pope continued, should be able to hear the voice of God, in her or his own conscience and through listening to the Scriptures. It is important that people are accompanied on this journey by the confessor, who may also become a spiritual advisor, he said, though he added that priests should only accept such a request and never put themselves forward for that role.

Discerning a vocation, Pope Francis said, means helping young people read the signs that God has placed in each of their lives, through prayer, through their gifts and personal inclinations and through encounters with people they have met.

Witness to God's mercy

The confessor, he concluded, is called, above all, to be a witness by carrying the sins of the penitent, as Jesus did, and by witnessing to God's mercy to the prodigal son, which is the heart of the Gospel.