

Does Pope Francis' 'Passport to Paradise' Fall in Line With the Bible?

Pope Francis welcomed the poor, homeless and unemployed as guests of honor for a Mass and gourmet meal in the Vatican on Sunday, saying that helping the needy was one way of obtaining a "passport to paradise."

Francis celebrated a Mass marking the Roman Catholic Church's first yearly World Day of the Poor, which the pope established to draw the attention of the world's 1.2 billion Catholics to the neediest.

Volunteers from charity organizations brought about 7,000 needy people to St. Peter's Basilica for a special Mass celebrated by the pope, who has made defense of the poor, immigrants and downtrodden a major plank of his papacy.

About 1,500 of them were having lunch with the pope in the Vatican's large audience hall and others were being taken to eat as guests in nearby pontifical colleges.

Most of the needy people were from Rome and other parts of Italy but charity groups also brought groups from France, Spain, Germany and Poland.

"If in the eyes of the world they (the poor) have little value, they are the ones who open to us the way to heaven; they are our 'passport to paradise.' For us it is an evangelical duty to care for them," he said in his homily.

"God will not ask us if we felt righteous indignation, but whether we did some good," he said, labeling indifference as a sin of omission.

The pope said this "is when we say, 'that doesn't concern me;

it's not my business, it's society's problem.'

"It is when we turn away from a brother or sister in need, when we change channels as soon as a disturbing question comes up, when we grow indignant at evil but do nothing about it."

The menu for the poor was selected by Sergio Dussin, the same chef who prepares meals for visiting dignitaries at Vatican conferences.

It consisted of dishes the poor can only dream of: mini gnocchi, fish with tomatoes, olives, Venetian cheese, veal with vegetables and Venetian-style tiramisu for dessert.

Three days after his election in 2013, Francis said: "Oh, how I would like a poor Church, and for the poor."

He since given up some of the trappings of the papacy, shunning the spacious papal apartments in the Vatican's Apostolic Palace for a modest residence in a guest house.

He also has put aside the papal limousine and is driven around Rome in a simple blue Ford Focus.