

Pope Francis: 'Ask Holy Spirit for Strength Not to Be Afraid of Those Who Command Us to Be Silent'

Pope Francis prayed for the strength to stand up against coercion and opposition and said during his weekly general audience that the "great Christian answer" is to "obey God before men."

"We ask the Holy Spirit for the strength to not be afraid of those who command us to be silent, who slander us or even make an attempt on our lives," he told the 10,000 faithful who gathered in St. Peter's Square on Wednesday (Aug. 28).

"We ask it to strengthen us from within so that we may be confident of the loving and consoling presence of the Lord at our side."

The pope drew his reflections from the day's reading from the Acts of the Apostles. In that passage, Jesus' disciple Peter provokes the anger and envy of the theological elite by healing the sick.

Peter, said Pope Francis, presents the key to Christian life, which is to place the will of God before the demands of men.

"This means listening to God with no reservations, no procrastinations, no calculations," he said. "As we strive to be of service to our brothers and sisters, let us ask the Holy Spirit for the interior strength of knowing that the Lord is always at our side."

The pope also referenced an upcoming anniversary of the start of World War II. Sept. 1 marks the 80th anniversary of the

invasion of Poland by Nazi Germany and the beginning of that conflict.

World leaders, including President Donald Trump, will attend the commemoration ceremonies in Poland, a country that suffered about 6 million deaths as a result of the war, about half of them Jewish.

The pope does not plan to attend that event. But he did address Polish pilgrims during his audience.

On the day of the anniversary, the pope said, “we shall all pray for peace, so that the tragic consequences of hate—which brought only destruction, suffering and death—may never be repeated.”

“Let’s pray so that peace may reign in the hearts of men, in families, in societies and among peoples,” he added.

In his remarks, Francis also emphasized the role of the Catholic Church as a “field hospital,” which must administer spiritual care to those in need, especially the weak and sick.

“The sick are privileged by the church,” he said in an off-the-cuff remark. “They are not to be disposed, but on the contrary, they are to be cared for and nurtured. They are the object of Christian concern.”

In the day’s reading, Peter imitates Christ by walking among the sick and taking their pain and ailments onto himself, said the pope.

“The vitality of the emerging church, even when threatened by attacks, can be seen in the ministry of St. Peter,” Francis said. “Like Jesus, he is drawn to the suffering, especially the sick and infirm, and—filled with the Spirit of the Lord—he carries out Christ’s own work of healing.”

Francis described Peter’s care for the sick as a “healing caress,” capable of communicating health and tenderness, but

also of administering life, salvation and dignity.

“In sickness, which represents an impediment to going forward in life, there is always the presence of Jesus calling each of us to sustain and heal the sick,” he added in an unscripted remark.

The pope’s concern for people living with sickness and disease made headlines last week when a young girl living with an unknown disease began to dance, clap and run on the podium during the general audience.

“This poor girl suffers from a disease,” Francis said on the occasion while stopping the guards who had rushed to stop her. “When you see someone who is suffering, we must pray.” {eoa}

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