

Pope: 'We Cannot Become Starched Christians'

Pope Francis shared personal moments with 200,000 people on Saturday, telling them he sometimes nods off while praying at the end of a long day and that it "breaks my heart" that the death of a homeless person is not news.

Francis, who has made straight talk and simplicity a hallmark of his papacy, made his unscripted comments in answers to questions by four people at a huge international gathering of Catholic associations in St. Peter's Square.

But he outdid himself in passionately discussing everything from the memory of his grandmother to his decision to become a priest, from political corruption to his worries about a Church that too often closes in on itself instead of looking outward.

"If we step outside of ourselves, we will find poverty," he said, repeating his call for Catholics to do more to seek out those on the fringes of society who need help the most," he said from the steps of St. Peter's Basilica

"Today, and it breaks my heart to say it, finding a homeless person who has died of cold, is not news. Today, the news is scandals, that is news, but the many children who don't have food – that's not news. This is grave. We can't rest easy while things are this way."

The crowd, most of whom are already involved in charity work, interrupted him often with applause.

"We cannot become starched Christians, too polite, who speak of theology calmly over tea. We have to become courageous Christians and seek out those (who need help most)," he said.

To laughter from the crowd, he described how he prays each day before an altar before going to bed.

“Sometimes I doze off, the fatigue of the day makes you fall asleep, but he (God) understands,” he said.

Crisis of Values

Francis, the former Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio of Buenos Aires, said the world was going through not just an economic crisis but a crisis of values.

“This is happening today. If investments in banks fall, it is a tragedy and people say ‘what are we going to do?’ but if people die of hunger, have nothing to eat or suffer from poor health, that’s nothing. This is our crisis today. A Church that is poor and for the poor has to fight this mentality,” he said.

Many in the crowd planned to stay in the square overnight to pray and prepare for Francis’ Mass on Sunday, when the Catholic Church marks Pentecost, the day it teaches that the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles.

On Saturday morning, Francis met German Chancellor Angela Merkel and discussed Europe’s economic crisis.

Apparently responding to his criticism of a heartless “dictatorship of the economy” earlier in the week, Merkel, who is up for re-election in September, later called for stronger regulation of financial markets.

On Thursday, Francis appealed in a speech for world financial reform, saying the global economic crisis had made life worse for millions in rich and poor countries.