Vatican



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Pope Francis has said the Catholic Church's missionary work in today's era must include reaching out to countries in Europe that have closed their borders to migrants and refugees, hoping to convince their people to open their hearts to those in need.

In a question and answer session with members of the Jesuit order in Myanmar last month, the text of which was made public for the first time Dec. 14, the pontiff recalled meeting refugees in visits to Lampedusa, Italy and Lesbos, Greece.

"To see them is to see Christ suffering and crucified," Francis told his Jesuit confreres, referencing the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius of Loyola.

"Unfortunately, in Europe there are countries that have chosen to close their borders," the pope continued, according to a text of the encounter published Dec. 14 by La Civiltà Cattolica.

"The most painful thing is that to take such a decision they had to close their hearts," he said. "Our missionary work must also reach those hearts that are closed to the reception of others."

Francis usually meets members of his religious order in every country he visits, and the texts of their discussions together are frequently published at a later date in

Civiltà Cattolica. The Dec. 14 issue of the Italian Jesuit magazine includes a recounting of the pope's encounters with 31 Jesuits in Myanmar Nov. 29 and 13 Jesuits in Bangladesh Dec. 1.

Continuing to speak about refugees in the Myanmar meeting, the pontiff recalled meeting a man in a refugee camp during his April 2016 visit to Lesbos. The pope said the man recounted how his wife had been killed before his eyes by terrorists.

"These things must be seen and must be told," Francis told the Jesuits. "These things do not come to the living rooms of our big cities. We are obliged to report and make public these human tragedies that some try to silence."

The pontiff also spoke about the plight of refugees in the Bangladesh meeting, which took place immediately after Francis' emotional encounter with 16 Rohingya Muslims who had fled persecution in Myanmar for Bangladesh, where he said: "The presence of God today is also called Rohingya."

Francis told the Jesuits in Bangladesh that the witness of 17th-century Jesuit St. Peter Claver, who ministered to African slaves in Colombia, was "very dear" to him.

"His life was a prophecy, and he helped his brothers and sisters who lived in shameful conditions," said the pontiff. "But this shame today is not over."

"Today there is much discussion about how to save the banks," the pope continued. "The problem is the salvation of the banks. But who saves the dignity of men and women today?"

"Nobody cares about people in ruins any longer," he said. "The devil manages to do this in today’s world. If we had a little sense of reality, this should scandalize us. The media scandal today concerns the banks and not the people."

"The impudence of our world is such that the only solution is to pray and ask for the grace of tears," said Francis. 'This evening, in front of those poor people I met, I felt ashamed! I felt ashamed of myself, for the whole world!"

Francis also spoke at length in the Myanmar meeting about how young Jesuits should be trained, and about how the order should interact with members of the church's hierarchy. The pope said one of the most important things a young Jesuit should learn is how to discern the will of God for his life.

"If you meet a Jesuit who is in formation but cannot discern, who has not learned discernment and who shows little intention to learn it, even if he is an excellent young man, tell him to look for another path," the pontiff advised the Jesuits in Myanmar. "The Jesuit must be a master of discernment, for himself and for others."

"St. Ignatius did not ask us to do two examinations of conscience a day to get rid of lice or fleas," said Francis, referring to the founder of the order. "No, he did it because we would like to see what happens in our heart."

"In my opinion, the vocational criterion for the Society is this: Can the candidate discern?" said the pope. "Will he learn to discern?"

"If he knows how to discern, he knows how to recognize what comes from God and what comes from the bad spirit, then this is enough for him to go on," said Francis. "Even if he does not understand much, even if they fail him at the exams ... it is okay, as long as he knows spiritual discernment."

"Think of St. Peter Claver," the pope advised. "He knew how to discern and knew that God wanted him to spend his life among the black slaves. Meanwhile some esteemed theologians were discussing whether or not they had a soul."

Asked what the Jesuits in Myanmar could do for the wider Catholic Church in the country, Francis advised his confreres: "We must be close to the hierarchy."

"If I do not agree with what the bishop says, I must have the *parrhesia* (boldness) to go and talk to him with courage and dialogue," said the pontiff. "And eventually obey."

"One cannot think of the Society of Jesus as a parallel Church, or a sub-Church," the pope continued. "We all belong to the holy and sinful Church. We belong to the Church in joy and sadness."

"We have examples of great Jesuits who felt crucified by the Church of their time and kept their mouths shut," said Francis, referring specifically to French Jesuit theologian and Cardinal Henri de Lubac, who was removed from his teaching position for about a decade until shortly before the Second Vatican Council.

"Be men of the Church," said the pontiff. "When the Society gets into the orbit of self-sufficiency, it stops being the Society of Jesus."

In Bangladesh, Francis also spoke about why he has chosen to name many cardinals from places in the world that have never had cardinals before.

"Naming the cardinals, I tried to look at small Churches, those that grow in the peripheries, at the edges," he said. "Not to give consolation to those Churches, but to launch a clear message: the small Churches that grow in the periphery and are without ancient Catholic traditions today must speak to the universal Church, to the whole Church. I feel clearly that they have something to teach us."

In Myanmar, the pope reveled in some of his trademark humor. Asked why he spends time with Jesuits in nearly every country he visits, Francis responded: "To not forget that I am a missionary and that I must convert sinners!"

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