Vatican
Francis, the comic strip



Pope Francis speaks during his general audience in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican June 6. (CNS/Paul Haring)

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Peace is a gift that can easily be destroyed through petty gossip and speaking ill of others, Pope Francis said.

People who receive and give the sign of peace "should be men and women of peace" and not ruin "the peace made by the Holy Spirit with your tongue," the pope said June 6 during his weekly general audience.

"Gossip is not a work of the Holy Spirit, it is not a work of the unity of the church. Gossip destroys the work of God. Please stop gossiping," the pope said.

Continuing his series of audience talks on confirmation, Pope Francis spoke about the gift of the Holy Spirit that Christians receive in the sacrament.

When a person is anointed with oil, that gift "enters us and bears fruit so that we can then give it to others," the pope explained. The gift is not meant to be tucked away and stored "as if the soul was a warehouse."

While it usually is the bishop, who is a successor of the apostles and guarantor of the unity of the church, that confers the sacrament of confirmation upon person, his role does not exclude the bishop from the Christian duty of charity and love.

"Some may think that in the church there are masters — the pope, the bishops, the priests — and then the workers who are something else," he said. "No, the church is everyone. And we all have the responsibility of sanctifying one another, of caring for others. The church is 'us.' Everyone has their job in the church, but we are all the church."

During the sacrament of confirmation, he continued, the bishop tells the candidate, "Peace be with you," which is "a gesture that expresses the ecclesial communion with the bishop and with all the faithful."

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However, that gift can be lost if Christians start saying mean things about each other once they leave Mass.

"Gossip is war," the pope said. "Poor Holy Spirit! (Imagine) the work he has with us with our habit of gossiping!"

Pope Francis urged the faithful to preach the Gospel with deeds and words "that edify and not with words of gossip that destroy."

Like the parable of the talents, he added, the Holy Spirit's gift is a seed that bears fruit when it is shared with others and not "when it is buried because of selfish fears."

"When we have the seed in hand, it isn't meant to be stored in a closet, it is meant to be sown. All life must be sown so that it bears fruit and multiply. We must give the gift of the Spirit back to the community," the pope said.