Vatican

Francis, the comic strip



Pope Francis leads the Angelus Sept. 16 from the window of his studio overlooking St. Peter's Square at the Vatican. (CNS/EPA/Favio Frustaci)

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True followers of Jesus profess their faith not through pre-packaged platitudes but rather through concrete actions of love for their neighbors, Pope Francis said.

When he asked the disciples who they think he is, Jesus wasn't interested in "ready-made responses [or] quoting famous personalities of Sacred Scriptures because a faith that is reduced to formulas is a myopic faith," the pope said Sept. 16 during his Sunday Angelus address.

After praying the Angelus prayer, the pope welcomed the pilgrims gathered in St. Peter's Square and said he wanted to give them a gift to commemorate the Sept. 14 feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross.

Francis said the gift, a silver crucifix distributed by the papal almoner's office, wasn't an "ornamental object" but a "sign of the love of God who, in Jesus, gave his life for us."

"I invite you to receive this gift and place it in your homes, in your children's room or your grandparent's [room]; in any place but it must be seen in your home," he said. "By looking at Jesus crucified, we are looking at our salvation."

Before praying the Angelus prayer, the pope reflected on the Sunday Gospel reading in which Peter professes his faith in Christ, and Jesus explains the price that is paid for following him.

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"Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the Gospel will save it," Jesus said.

Christ's words, the pope explained, affirm that his mission and those of his disciples "isn't carried out on the wide road of success but on the arduous path of the suffering servant: humiliated, rejected and crucified."

Like Peter who objected to Jesus' assertion, Christians can also "protest and rebel because this doesn't meet our expectations," he said.

Professing one's faith in Christ, Francis added, doesn't "stop at words but must be authenticated by concrete choices and gestures, by a life marked by God's love, a great life, a life with so much love for one's neighbor."

"Often in life, for many reasons, we take the wrong path, looking for happiness only in things or in people who we treat like things," the pope said. "But we can only find happiness when love, that true love, finds us, surprises us and changes us. Love changes everything."