Vatican
Francis, the comic strip

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God accomplishes great things when Christians cast aside doubt and generously place themselves in his service, Pope Francis said.

Speaking to pilgrims in St. Peter's Square Feb. 10 for his Sunday Angelus address, the pope said that Jesus invites all men and women who are discouraged to trust in him, so he can fulfill "a greater plan" just as he did with his disciples.

Jesus' "invitation to go out in the open sea of today's humanity to be witnesses of goodness and mercy gives new meaning to our existence, which often risks collapsing in on itself," he said.

After praying the Angelus prayer, the pope commemorated the World Day of Prayer and Awareness Against Human Trafficking, which is celebrated Feb. 8 — the feast day of St. Josephine Bakhita, who was kidnapped as a child and sold into slavery in Sudan and Italy.

He also appealed to world leaders "to tackle the causes of this scourge decisively and to protect the victims" before leading pilgrims in praying to the patron saint of Sudan.

"O St. Bakhita, assist all those who are trapped in a state of slavery; intercede with God on their behalf so that they will be released from their chains of captivity. Those whom man enslaves, let God set free," he prayed.

In his address, the pope reflected on the Sunday Gospel reading from St. Luke in which Jesus calls Peter to follow him.

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Recalling Peter's obedience to Christ in laying out the nets, despite not catching any fish all night, the pope said the apostle's response was "an answer of faith that we are also called to give, it is the attitude of willingness that the Lord asks of all his disciples, especially those who have responsibilities in the church."

However, he added, Christians can also be "hesitant" when they hear Christ's call and be "tempted to reject it because of our inadequacy" like Peter who, seeing the miraculous catch of fish, felt ashamed.

"This humble prayer is beautiful: 'Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man,' " the pope said. Peter "said it on his knees before the one he had come to recognize as Lord."

The merciful response given by Jesus is an encouragement for all Christians to trust him because he "frees us from our sin and opens up a new horizon for us: to collaborate in his mission," the pope said.

Pope Francis said the greatest miracle performed by Christ that day was not the big haul of fish but helping the disciples to not to fall into despair in the face of "disappointment and discouragement."

"Jesus opened them up to become proclaimers and witnesses of his word and the kingdom of God," the pope said. "And the disciples' response was prompt and complete: 'When they brought their boats to the shore, they left everything and followed him.' "