Spirituality
Francis, the comic strip

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A life marked by humility, faith and love determines whether Christians enter heaven, not who they know, Pope Francis said.

Before praying the Angelus prayer with pilgrims gathered in St. Peter's Square Aug. 25, the pope said that the Lord will recognize those worthy of experiencing eternal joy if they have lived "a life of faith that translates into deeds" and not whether they have attended conferences or rubbed shoulders with church leaders.

"The Lord does not recognize us by our titles," he said. "'Look, Lord, I belonged to this association; I was a friend of that bishop, of that cardinal, of that priest.' No, titles do not count; they do not count," he said.

Greeting pilgrims after the prayer, Francis had special words of welcome for the new seminarians, most from the United States, beginning their studies at the Pontifical North American College in Rome.

The pope urged the men to maintain a strong commitment to their spiritual lives and "fidelity to Christ, to the Gospel and to the magisterium of the church. Without

building on these columns, it will be impossible to truly construct your vocation."

In his main talk, the pope reflected on the Sunday Gospel reading from St. Luke in which Jesus, while preaching in a village, is asked if only a few people will be saved.

Jesus' response, the pope explained, doesn't focus on how many will be admitted into heaven but rather on the duty of God's children to "strive to enter through the narrow gate."

"With these words, Jesus makes it clear that it isn't a question of numbers, there isn't a limited number in paradise! But it is a matter of following the right path now, and this right path is for everyone, but it is narrow," he said.

The pope said that Jesus doesn't deceive his followers and tell them that the path to heaven is "a beautiful highway with a large door at the end," but rather is a confined passageway.

To save oneself, he explained, "one must love God and neighbor, and this is not comfortable."

"It is a 'narrow gate' because it is demanding; love is always demanding, it requires commitment, indeed, an 'effort,' that is, a firm and persevering will to live according to the Gospel," the pope said. "St. Paul calls it 'the good fight of faith.' It takes an effort every day to love God and one's neighbor."

To obtain the joy of heaven, Francis said, Christians are called to be in communion with Christ by praying and receiving the sacraments and reading the Word of God which "keeps us in faith, nourishes our hope and revives charity."

"And in this way, through the grace of God, we can and we must spend our lives for the good of our brothers and sisters, fighting against all forms of evil and injustice."

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