Vatican
News
Francis, the comic strip



An elderly woman in Grevenbroich, Germany, walks through a corridor of a retirement home March 16, 2020. Pope Francis urged Christians March 17 to remember the elderly who are suffering not only loneliness but also fear due to the spread of the coronavirus. (CNS/Reuters/Thilo Schmuelgen)

Junno Arocho Esteves

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Vatican City — March 17, 2020
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As Italy entered its second week of lockdown, Pope Francis urged Christians to remember the elderly who are suffering not only loneliness but also fear due to the spread of the coronavirus.

"Today, I would like us to pray for the elderly who are suffering now in a particular way, with great interior solitude and sometimes great fear. Let us pray that the Lord would be close to our grandfathers and grandmothers — to all the elderly — and give them strength," the pope said March 17 during a live broadcast of his morning Mass.

According to a March 13 report by the Italian National Institute of Health, the median age of men and women who have died from COVID-19 is 80. As of March 16, the Italian health ministry reported that over 2,150 people have died from the virus.

The elderly "gave us wisdom, life, history — let us also be near them in prayer," Francis said at the beginning of his Mass.

In his homily, the pope reflected on the day's Gospel reading from St. Matthew, in which Peter asks Jesus how often must one forgive if "if my brother sins against me."

"I say to you, not seven times but seventy-seven times," Jesus replied.

The pope said that forgiveness never comes easy because "our self-centered hearts are always attached to hatred, revenge, resentment."

"We've all seen families destroyed by hatred that is passed down from one generation to the next. Brothers and sisters, who in front of a parent's coffin, don't even greet each other because they're carrying past resentments," he said. "It seems that attachment to hatred is stronger than attachment to love and this is

precisely — we may say — the devil's treasure."

However, the pope continued, God does not condemn, but forgives and is "able to throw a feast for a sinner who draws near to him and he forgets everything."

"When God forgives us, he forgets all the evil we have done. Someone has said it is God's sickness. He doesn't have a memory. He can lose his memory in these cases. God loses his memory regarding the ugly story of so many sinners, of our sins," Francis said.

"He only asks us to do the same, to learn how to forgive," he said.

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