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Francis, the comic strip

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Pope Francis began his early morning Mass praying for prisoners experiencing great uncertainty and worrying about their families who cannot visit them due to lockdown measures to contain the coronavirus pandemic.

Dressed in white vestments to commemorate the feast of St. Joseph March 19, the pope expressed his closeness to prisoners "who suffer so much in this moment of uncertainty and pain."

"Let us pray today for our brothers and sisters who are in prison," he said at the beginning of his morning Mass. "They suffer so much because of the uncertainty of what will happen inside the prison and thinking about their families, wondering how they are, if someone is sick, if they lack something."

The pope also invited those following the livestreamed broadcast of the Mass to make an act of spiritual Communion, and he led them in a traditional prayer for those unable to receive the sacrament:

"At thy feet, O my Jesus, I prostrate myself and I offer thee repentance of my contrite heart, which is humbled in its nothingness and in thy holy presence. I adore thee in the sacrament of thy love, the ineffable Eucharist. I desire to receive thee into the poor dwelling that my heart offers thee. While waiting for the happiness of sacramental Communion, I wish to possess thee in spirit. Come to me, O my Jesus, since I for my part, am coming to thee. May thy love embrace my whole being in life and in death. I believe in thee, I hope in thee, I love thee. Amen."

In his homily, the pope reflected on the day's Gospel reading from St. Matthew, in which St. Joseph is described as "a righteous man."

The pope said St. Joseph was chosen to be the foster father of Jesus "not only because he believed, but also because he lived his faith."

Reflecting on St. Joseph's ability to balance his duties as a husband, father and carpenter, the pope said St. Joseph's holiness was defined by his ability to "carry on his life and his craft with righteousness, with professionalism."

"The Lord chose a just man, a man of faith, a man capable of being a man and capable of speaking with God, of entering into the mystery of God," he said.

St. Joseph's dream, in which he was told to not be afraid of taking Mary as his wife, was an example that Christ's foster father was able "to enter into the mystery."

"I think of the church today, on this solemnity of St. Joseph," the pope said. "Our faithful, our bishops, our priests, our consecrated men and women, the popes: are they capable of entering into the mystery? Or do they need to regulate themselves according to the prescriptions that defend them from what they cannot control?"

Concluding his homily, Francis prayed that, like St. Joseph, the church may "live in the concreteness of daily life and in the concreteness of the mystery."

Without that ability to enter the mystery, he warned, the church runs the risk of becoming "a pious association, following prescriptions but without the sense of adoration."

"To enter into the mystery is not to dream," the pope said. "To enter into the mystery is precisely this: to adore. To enter into the mystery today is to do what we will do in the future when we arrive at God's presence: adore."

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