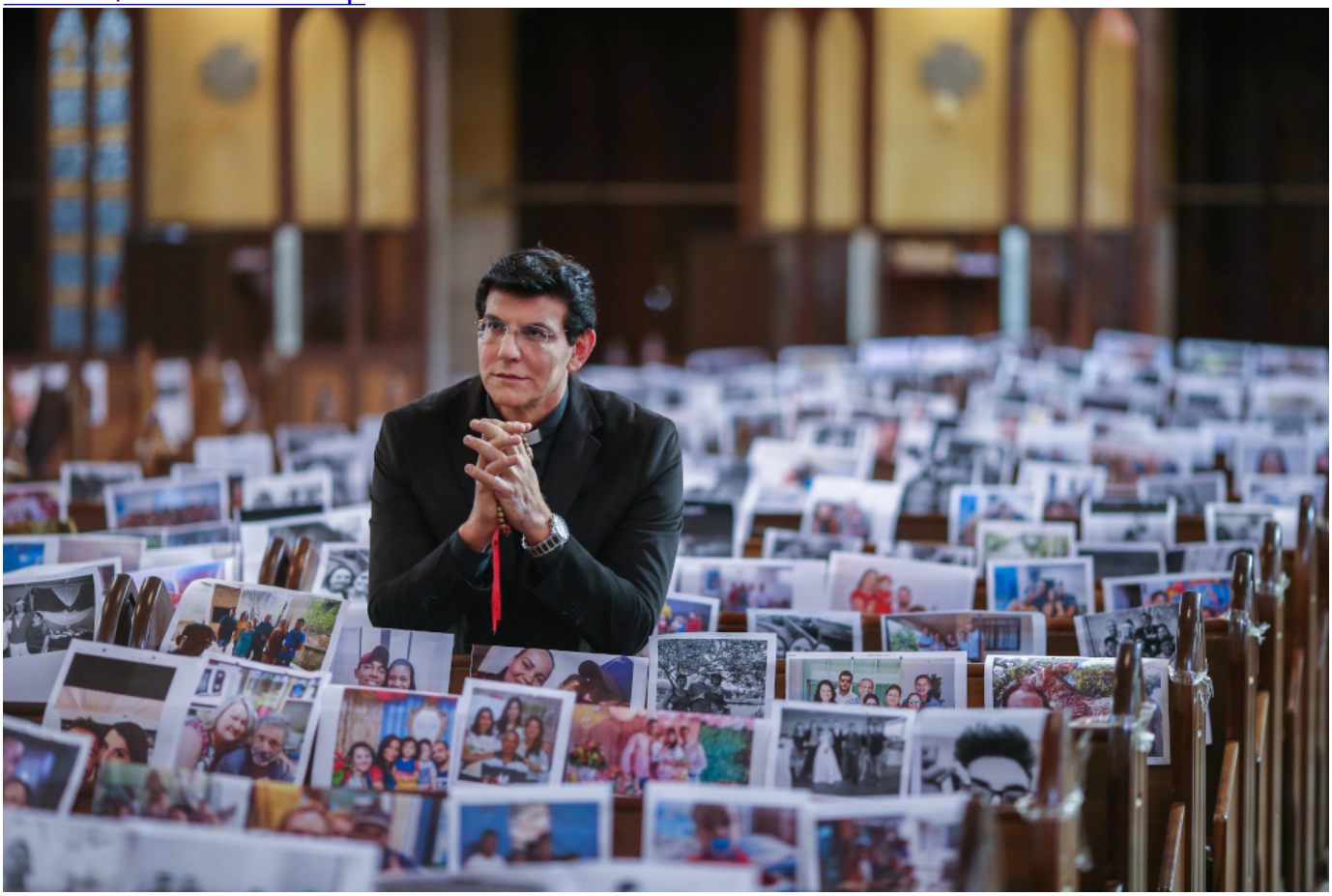
Vatican

Francis, the comic strip



Fr. Reginaldo Manzotti prays during Mass with photos of his parishioners taped to the pews in the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Curitiba, Brazil, March 21, 2020. (CNS/Reuters/Rodolfo Buhrer)

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Discovering one's vocation to marriage, priesthood or religious life and making the decision to embrace it takes courage, Pope Francis said.

The Lord knows "the questions, doubts and difficulties that toss the boat of our heart, and so he reassures us, 'Take heart, it is I; have no fear!'" the pope wrote in his message for the World Day of Prayer for Vocations, which will be celebrated May 3 in most dioceses.

Using the story from the Gospel of Matthew of the disciples in the boat on a stormy Sea of Galilee, Francis said Jesus calls people to a specific vocation "because he wants to enable us, like Peter, to 'walk on water,' in other words, to take charge of our lives and place them at the service of the Gospel in the concrete and everyday ways that he shows us, and specifically in the different forms of lay, priestly and consecrated vocation."

For most people, he said, hearing that call and being excited by it almost always is mixed with fear and worries about one's weaknesses.

"If we let ourselves be daunted by the responsibilities that await us — whether in married life or priestly ministry — or by the hardships in store for us, then we will soon turn away from the gaze of Jesus and, like Peter, we will begin to sink," he wrote. But the gift of faith enables people to keep walking toward Jesus.

"Whenever fatigue or fear make us start to sink, Jesus holds out his hand to us," the pope wrote. "He gives us the enthusiasm we need to live our vocation with joy and fervor."

Trusting the Lord and following his call is similar to the disciples' journey in the boat, he said.

"The risk involved is real: the night falls, the headwinds howl, the boat is tossed by the waves, and fear of failure, of not being up to the call, can threaten to overwhelm

them," he wrote.

But the Gospel assures Christians that "in the midst of this challenging journey we are not alone," the pope said. "Like the first ray of dawn in the heart of the night, the Lord comes walking on the troubled waters to join the disciples; he invites Peter to come to him on the waves, saves him when he sees him sinking and, once in the boat, makes the winds die down."

"Every vocation is born of that gaze of love with which the Lord came to meet us, perhaps even at a time when our boat was being battered by the storm," the pope said. All it takes to discover one's vocation is to open one's heart to God's love and open one's eyes to the signs of where God already is working.

In the Gospel story, when the disciples first see Jesus walking toward them, they first think that he is a ghost.

"What frequently hinders our journey, our growth, our choosing the road the Lord is marking out for us, are certain 'ghosts' that trouble our hearts," he said, especially "the ghost of disbelief" that cause one to question if that really is the path God is calling one to take.

And in continuing to pursue one's vocation as a calling from God, he said, there also is the danger of "fatigue."

Speaking directly to married couples, priests and religious, Francis said, "I am conscious of your hard work, the sense of isolation that can at times weigh upon your hearts, the risk of falling into a rut that can gradually make the ardent flame of our vocation die down, the burden of the uncertainty and insecurity of the times and worry about the future."

But, he said, "take heart, do not be afraid! Jesus is at our side, and if we acknowledge him as the one Lord of our lives, he will stretch out his hand, take hold of us and save us."

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