Vatican

Francis, the comic strip



Vatican staff members in protective gear sanitize the holy water font inside St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican May 15, 2020, ahead of the resumption of Masses during the COVID-19 pandemic. (CNS/ Reuters/Yara Nardi)

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Pope Francis offered prayers and thanks to men and women who work each day to ensure that hospitals and neighborhoods are clean during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Today, our prayer is for the many people who clean hospitals, streets, who empty the garbage cans, who go around to houses to collect the garbage," the pope said May 17 at the start of his Sunday Mass in the Domus Sanctae Marthae.

It is "a job that no one sees but that is necessary to survive," he said. "May the Lord bless them and help them."

After reciting the "Regina Coeli" prayer at midday, Francis noted that in Italy and other countries, lockdown restrictions are beginning to ease, and he asked Catholics to continue respecting safety guidelines.

Italian authorities and the country's bishops reached an agreement allowing public Masses to resume May 18 under several restrictions, including wearing face masks inside the church and observing social distancing.

"Please," the pope said, "let us go forward with the norms and procedures given to us to safeguard the health of each one of us and the people."

He also greeted the many boys and girls who are unable to publicly celebrate their first Communion in the month of May.

"My dear ones, I invite you to live this time of waiting as an opportunity to prepare yourselves better by praying, reading your catechism book to deepen your knowledge of Jesus and growing in kindness and service to others," he said.

In his homily at Mass earlier in the day, the pope reflected on the Sunday Gospel reading from St. John in which Jesus promises the coming of the Holy Spirit "who remains with you and will be in you."

"I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you," Jesus said. "On that day, you will realize that I am in my Father and you are in me and I in you."

In promising to be with them before his ascension into heaven, Jesus defends his disciples "from the painful feeling of orphanhood," a feeling that is common when one loves material possessions instead of God.

"Today in the world, there is a great feeling of being orphaned. Many people have many things, but the Father is missing. And this is often repeated in the history of humanity," he said.

This sense of being orphans, he added, affects people's "sense of belonging and fraternity."

The Holy Spirit comes "not to make us his clients" but to "remind and teach" all men and women that they have "access to the Father," the pope said.

"Only through this consciousness of being children who are not orphans can we live in peace among ourselves," he said. "Wars, both small and great, always have a dimension of orphanhood: there is no father to make peace."

The pope further commented on the Gospel before reciting the "Regina Coeli" prayer, which was livestreamed from the library of the Apostolic Palace.

Francis said that Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit is the promise of "God's gift of love" to every Christian.

"After Jesus died and rose again, his love is given to those who believe in him and are baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit," he said. "The Spirit himself guides them, enlightens them, strengthens them, so that each one may walk in life, even through adversity and difficulty, in joys and sorrows, remaining in the way of Jesus."

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