Vatican
Francis, the comic strip



Pope Francis greets the crowd as he leads the Angelus from the window of his studio overlooking St. Peter's Square at the Vatican June 7, 2020. The pope urged people to not declare victory against COVID-19 but continue to be careful and follow health precautions. (CNS/Vatican Media)

Carol Glatz

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Pope Francis prayed for people living in countries where COVID-19 is still causing a huge number of deaths, and he cautioned people in Italy to continue to be careful and follow health precautions.

"Be careful, do not sing 'Victory!' yet, do not celebrate victory too soon! It remains necessary to follow the rules in force carefully because they are rules that help us to prevent the virus from gaining ground," he said June 7 after reciting the Angelus prayer from the window of the Apostolic Palace.

He greeted the few hundred visitors who had assembled in St. Peter's Square, maintaining social distancing and many wearing masks.

Seeing people in the square, he said, was a sign that "the acute phase" of the pandemic in Italy was over, which had led to the gradual easing of restrictive measures.

But the pope cautioned everyone to continue to be careful.

"Thanks be to God we are coming out of the epicenter stronger, but always with the rules given the authorities give us," he said.

The Vatican press office had announced the evening before that the last Vatican employee who had tested positive for the coronavirus was now testing negative. A total of 12 cases were reported among Vatican employees since late February. None of the 12 died.

He reminded people, however, that "the virus continues to claim many victims" in other countries.

"I wish to express my closeness to those populations, to the sick and their families, and to all those who care for them. With our prayer, let us be close to them."

The pandemic is claiming large numbers of victims in the United States and other countries in Central, South and North America, according to the World Health Organization June 6.

Some countries were also seeing "upticks" in COVID-19 cases as lockdowns eased, which meant people had to continue to follow precautions, Margaret Harris, a WHO spokesperson said from Geneva.

In his Angelus talk, Francis talked about the importance of the day's feast of the Most Holy Trinity, which celebrates God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The June 7 feast day "invites us to let ourselves once again be fascinated by the beauty of God; beauty, goodness and boundless truth."

"This is faith — to welcome God-as-Love," who gives himself in Christ, "who moves us in the Holy Spirit," the pope said.

Christian life, he said, is letting oneself be encountered by God because "he encounters us first" and to trust in him, to search for him and to love.

The pope also reminded people that the month of June was dedicated in a special way to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

"Indeed, the human and divine heart of Jesus is the wellspring where we can always draw upon God's mercy, forgiveness and tenderness," he said.

At the center of Jesus' every gesture and word there is love, "the love of the Father who sent his Son, the love of the Holy Spirit that is within us," he said.

He urged people to practice eucharistic adoration because they can find that love present in the Eucharist and "little by little, one's heart will become more patient, more generous, more merciful, in imitation of the heart of Jesus."

He also encouraged people to recite, for the month of June, a short prayer his grandmother taught him, "Jesus, let my heart resemble yours in all I do."

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