Vatican
Francis, the comic strip
Pope Francis greets the crowd as he leads the Angelus from the window of his studio overlook

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 28. (CNS/Vatican Media)

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While the suffering brought on by the coronavirus pandemic continues to make headlines, there is another serious illness plaguing the world today that deserves attention, Pope Francis said.

"What is the biggest disease in life? Cancer? Tuberculosis? The current pandemic? No. The greatest disease in life is the lack of love — not being able to love," the pope said June 27 during his Sunday Angelus address.

The pope reflected on the Sunday Gospel reading from of St. Mark in which Jesus raised a girl from the dead and healed a woman afflicted with hemorrhages after she touched his cloak.

Although both episodes of healing are meant "to tell us that neither suffering nor death have the last word," the pope said he wanted to focus on the healing of the woman with hemorrhages who suffered not only physically but also emotionally since she was marginalized and deemed impure due to her illness.

As a result, he said, the woman "lived alone with a wounded heart" and "tried many treatments" to heal from her suffering to no avail.

"We, too, how often do we throw ourselves into the wrong cures to satisfy our lack of love?" Francis asked.

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"We think that success and money make us happy, but love cannot be bought; it is free. We take refuge in the virtual world, but love is concrete. We do not accept ourselves as we are and we hide behind the exterior 'make up,' but love is not an appearance. We search for answers from magicians and from gurus, to then find ourselves without money and without peace, like that woman," he said.

However, the pope said the woman's healing emphasizes the importance of direct contact with Jesus who, in turn, "waits for us to encounter him, to open our hearts to him" and looks beyond "the ugly matters of our history" in order to heal.

"Jesus goes beyond sins. Jesus goes beyond prejudices. Jesus does not stop at appearances, but reaches the heart," Francis said. "Sister, brother, you are here, let Jesus look at and heal your heart. I too must do this: let Jesus look at my heart and heal it. And if you have already felt his tender gaze upon you, imitate him, and do as he does."