Francis, the comic strip
Pope Francis speaks as he leads the Angelus from the window of his studio overlooking St. Pe

Pope Francis speaks as he leads the Angelus from the window of his studio overlooking St. Peter's Square at the Vatican Sept. 26, 2021. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

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Christians must be on guard and avoid the temptation of thinking themselves better than others, an attitude that risks turning the church into a place of "separation and not communion," Pope Francis said.

"Let us ask for the grace to overcome the temptation to judge and to categorize," the pope told pilgrims gathered in St. Peter's Square Sept. 26 during his Sunday Angelus address.

"And may God preserve us from the 'nest' mentality, that of jealously guarding ourselves in the small group of those who consider themselves good: the priest with his loyal followers, the pastoral workers closed in among themselves so that no one can infiltrate, the movements and associations in their own particular charism, and so on," he said.

Before praying the Angelus prayer, the pope reflected on the Sunday Gospel reading in which the apostle John complained to Jesus about someone who drove out demons in Jesus' name but was not among his followers.

"Do not prevent him. There is no one who performs a mighty deed in my name who can at the same time speak ill of me," Jesus said.

The disciples, the pope explained, "would like to hinder a good deed simply because it is performed by someone who did not belong to their group" because they believed they had "the exclusive right over Jesus" and that they were "the only ones authorized to work for the kingdom of God."

However, by falling into the temptation of "being closed," they end up thinking they are privileged and consider others as outsiders to the point of "becoming hostile toward them."

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"Every moment of being closed tends to keep us at a distance from those who do not think like we do, and this — as we know — is the root of so many evils in history: of the absolutism that has often generated dictatorships and so much violence toward those who are different," he said.

The church, he added, is not immune to that temptation, because the devil "insinuates suspicions to divide and exclude people."

"We, too, sometimes, instead of being humble and open communities, can give the impression of being at the 'top of the class' and keeping others at a distance; instead of trying to walk with everyone, we can show off our 'believer's license,'" he said.

"'I am a believer; I am Catholic; I belong to this or that association; and the others, poor things, do not.' This is a sin. Showing off one's 'believer's license' to judge and exclude," the pope said.

Pope Francis said the Holy Spirit wants openness in the church so that "there is a place for everyone."

Jesus also warns that instead of "judging everything and everyone," Christians should instead look to "be careful of ourselves" and that "if something in you causes you to sin, cut it off," the pope said.

"Jesus is radical in this, demanding, but for our own good, like a good doctor. Every cut, every pruning is so that we can grow better and bear fruit in love," he said.