News
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 Jan. 23, 2022. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

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VATICAN CITY — Preaching long, spiritually empty homilies can reduce the Word of God to a mere set of abstract concepts that fail to awaken one's soul, Pope Francis said.

"Even many homilies — I say it with respect but with pain — are abstract, and instead of awakening the soul, they put it to sleep. When the faithful start looking at their watches (and say), 'When is this going to end?', they put the soul to sleep," the pope said Jan. 24 during his Sunday Angelus address.

"Preaching runs this risk," he said. "Without the anointing of the Spirit, it impoverishes the Word of God and descends to moralism and abstract concepts; it

presents the Gospel with detachment, as if it were outside time, far from reality. And this is not the way."

After celebrating Mass for Sunday of the Word of God, the pope addressed a crowd gathered in St. Peter's Square for the midday Angelus prayer and reflected on the Sunday Gospel reading from St. Luke in which Jesus preaches for the first time.

Jesus' proclamation that "today this scripture has been fulfilled" still resonates and "indicates a 'today' that runs through all ages and always remains valid," he explained.

"The Word of God is always 'today.' It begins with a 'today;' when you read the Word of God, a 'today' begins in your soul, if you understand it well," he said. "It is not like ancient history, no. Today, it speaks to your heart."

While those who listened to Jesus' words were "clouded by prejudice" and didn't believe, the pope said they still could sense "that there is more to Jesus" because he has "the anointing of the Holy Spirit."

That anointing, which can move one's soul, is sometimes lacking in many sermons today, he added.

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"Sometimes it happens that our sermons and our teachings remain generic, abstract; they do not touch the soul and the life of the people," the pope said. "Yes, at times one hears impeccable conferences, well-constructed speeches, but they do not move the heart and so everything remains as before."

If those who preach want to give lectures or conferences, he added, "let them do so but elsewhere; not at the time of the homily, where they must give the Word in a way that rouses hearts."

Pope Francis thanked "preachers and proclaimers of the Gospel" who know how to awaken the hearts of those who listen, and he encouraged Christians to carry a pocket-size Gospel with them and read it because "the Word of God transforms an ordinary day into the today in which God speaks to us."

"In time, we will discover that these words are made especially for us, for our life," the pope said. "They will help us to welcome each day with a better, more serene outlook, because when the Gospel enters into today's world, it fills it with God."