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Pope Francis greets a child during his general audience in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican M

Pope Francis greets a child during his general audience in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican May 18, 2022. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)

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VATICAN CITY — Pope Francis praised the way people have faced the trials and losses in their lives with a firmness of faith in God's promises and love.

"We have all known people like this. We have been impressed by their cry, but we have also stood in admiration at the firmness of their faith and love," the pope said during his general audience in St. Peter's Square May 18.

Admirable examples include parents of children with serious disabilities, those who live with a permanent illness or those who are assisting a member of their family — all situations that are made worse when coupled with economic difficulties, he said.

Sometimes these burdens accumulate, seeming to pile on all at once, which is what has "happened in these years with the COVID-19 pandemic, and is happening now

with the war in Ukraine," the pope said.

Continuing his series of talks dedicated to the meaning and value of "old age," the pope reflected on an event in the life of Job, who suffered a devastating series of catastrophes and losses. Job's friends tell Job that his plight must be punishment for personal wrongdoing and a call from God to repent.

However, the pope said, God praises Job "because he understood the mystery of God's tenderness hidden behind his silence." Job is a witness of a faith who "does not accept a 'caricature' of God, but protests loudly in the face of evil until God responds and reveals his face," which is tender and respectful.

"God rebukes Job's friends who presumed they knew everything, knew about God and about suffering, and, having come to comfort Job, ended up judging him with their preconceived paradigms," he said.

The Book of Job represents what happens when it seems an excessive and unjust amount of suffering befalls an individual, a family or a people, he said, reflecting that saying, "When it rains it pours."

People cannot justify or blame this excessive evil on nature, history or the sins of the victims, as if they deserve it, he said.

However, God is not afraid of confrontation, and Job's protest is a way to pray, like children may protest against their parents to capture their attention and signal their need for care, he said.

It is OK to object "even to God. God will listen to you. God is a father. God is not afraid of our prayer of protest," so people can be free and spontaneous in expressing themselves in prayer, the pope said.

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"Perhaps we need to learn this respect and tenderness from God. And God does not like that encyclopedia — let's call it this — of explanations, of reflections that Job's friends make," the pope said. Job's friends display a kind of "religiosity that explains everything but remains cold at heart. God does not like this. He likes Job's protest and silence more."

"The turning point in the conversation of faith comes right at the height of Job's venting, where he says, 'I know that my redeemer lives,'" and he knows that he shall see God, the pope said.

This is "the simple faith in the resurrection of God, the simple faith in Jesus Christ, the simple faith that the Lord is always waiting for us and will come," he said, and it is a faith that can be seen in many older people who have experienced great difficulties.

So many people get to know God better after reaching out to him after experiencing things that are "a bit ugly, a bit dark," he said.

These people "have also seen the inconsistency of human promises. Lawyers, scientists, even men of religion, who confuse the persecutor with the victim, insinuating that they are fully responsible for their own suffering. They are mistaken!" the pope said.

The pope praised those elderly who can turn resentment "into a tenacity for awaiting God's promises" because they are an example to the rest of the faith community about facing "the excesses of evil."

"Let us look at old people ... with love. Let us see their personal experiences. They have suffered so much in life, they have learned so much in life, they have gone through so much, but in the end, they have this peace, a peace, I would say, that is almost mystical, that is, the peace from an encounter with God," he said.