Vatican

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 July 31, 2022. (CNS photo/Vatican Media via Reuters)

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Unbridled greed for wealth and possessions is a sickness that is the driving force behind wars and conflicts in the world, Pope Francis said.

The "hunger for possessions creates an addiction" that enslaves people and ultimately causes "an injustice never before seen in history: where few have so much and so many have little or nothing," the pope said July 31 during his Sunday Angelus address.

"Let's consider wars and conflicts as well. The lust for resources and wealth are almost always behind them. How many interests are behind war! Certainly, one of these is the arms trade. This trade is a scandal that we must never resign ourselves to," he told an estimated 12,000 pilgrims gathered in St. Peter's Square.

Before praying the Angelus prayer, the pope reflected on the Sunday Gospel reading from St. Luke in which Jesus warns a person quarreling over an inheritance to "take care to guard against all greed, for though one may be rich, one's life does not consist of possessions."

The incessant desire to be rich, he said, "is an illness that destroys people" because "those who have a lot are never content; they always want more and only for themselves."

"Jesus teaches us that at the heart of all this are not only some who are powerful, or certain economic systems. The greed that is in everyone's heart is at the center," the pope said.

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Christians, he continued, must reflect on their relationship with money and ask themselves whether they are happy with what they have or complain about not having enough.

"Material goods, money, and riches can become a cult, a true and proper idolatry," he added. "This is why Jesus warns us with strong words. He says you cannot serve two masters, and -- let's be careful -- he does not say God and the devil, no, or even the good and the bad, but, God and wealth."

However, Jesus' warning does not mean "no one should desire to be rich." In fact, "you can" and it is even "right to want it."

"It is beautiful to be rich, but rich according to God! God is the richest of anyone. He is rich in compassion, in mercy. His riches do not impoverish anyone, do not create quarrels and divisions. It is a wealth that knows how to give, to distribute, to share," the pope said.

Francis said true wealth is not in "accumulating material goods" but in fostering good relationships "with God, with others and with those who have less."

"May Our Lady help us understand what the true goods of life are, the ones that last forever," the pope said.