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Pope Francis waves from the window of the papal apartment

Pope Francis waves to the crowd gathered in St. Peter's Square for the midday recitation of the Angelus Oct. 30, 2022. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

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God always sees people's potential, looking past their mistakes and understanding what they can become, Pope Francis said.

If people feel they are "not up to the challenges of life and, even less, of the Gospel, mired in problems and sins, Jesus always looks at us with love," the pope told people gathered in St. Peter's Square Oct. 30 for the recitation of the Angelus prayer.

Jesus "comes toward us, he calls us by name and, if we welcome him, he comes to our home," he said.

Commenting on the encounter between Jesus and Zacchaeus, who collected taxes on behalf of the Roman rulers, the pope said Zacchaeus was rich, hated and branded a traitor and a sinner.

But, despite his lowliness, Zacchaeus "feels the need to seek another way of looking" and "awaits someone who will free him from his condition," the pope said.

"Zacchaeus teaches us that, in life, all is never lost," he said. "We can always find space for the desire to begin again, to start over, to convert."

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The pope said, "let us remember this: the gaze of God never stops at our past full of errors but looks with infinite confidence at what we can become."

"God has never looked down on us," he does not humiliate or judge people, Pope Francis said. "On the contrary, he lowered himself to the point of washing our feet, looking at us from below and restoring our dignity to us."

"How do we look at ourselves?" the pope asked. "Do we feel inadequate and resign ourselves, or precisely there, when we feel down, do we seek an encounter with Jesus?"

And then, he added, "what gaze do we have toward those who have erred, and who struggle to get up again from the dust of their mistakes? Is it a gaze from above, that judges, disdains, excludes?"

"We Christians must have the gaze of Christ, who embraces from below, who seeks those who are lost, with compassion. This is, and must be, the gaze of the church, always, the gaze of Christ, not the condemning gaze," he said.