Vatican
Vatican News
Pope Francis smiles at a baby who is held up towards him by a woman who also clutches mar

Pope Francis greets a baby during his general audience in the Paul VI hall at the Vatican Jan. 18, 2023. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)



Justin McLellan

Vatican Correspondent

View Author Profile

jmclellan@ncronline.org
Follow on Twitter at @m/McLellan_Js

Catholic News Service

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Vatican City — January 18, 2023
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Christians must develop a pastoral heart to care for those who have not heard the Gospel or who have left the fold, Pope Francis said.

"By being with Jesus, we discover that his pastoral heart always beats for the person who is confused, lost, far away," the pope said at his weekly general audience Jan. 18. "Jesus never said, 'Let them sort themselves out,' he went out to find them."

Francis encouraged Christians to model themselves on Jesus, the Good Shepherd, longing for those who have left the church just as a shepherd longs for lost sheep, rather than treating them as "adversaries or enemies."

"When we meet them at school, work or on the streets of our city, why don't we think instead that we have a beautiful opportunity to witness to them the joy of a Father who loves them and has never forgotten them?" the pope asked.

Being a shepherd is not merely a job, but a "true and proper way of life: 24 hours a day," he said. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, "does not just do something for us, but he gives his life for us."

The pope encouraged the pilgrims and visitors gathered in the Vatican's Paul VI Audience Hall to reflect on how God seeks out those who distance themselves from him, saying that many Christians may have followed Jesus for a long time but "have never wondered if we share his feelings, if we suffer and we take risks."

Advertisement

"The Lord suffers when we distance ourselves from his heart," he said, "but in response to this suffering he does not withdraw, rather he risks. He leaves the 99 sheep who are safe and ventures out for the lost one."

"Do we feel similar emotions?" the pope asked.

Without a love that suffers and takes risks for others, Francis said, "we risk being pastors only for ourselves."

At the end of his catechesis, the pope greeted a group of pilgrims from Congo, where he will travel Jan. 31, and asked for prayers for the country.

He also remembered Fr. Isaac Achi, who was killed Jan. 15 when bandits set fire to his parish rectory in Minna, Nigeria.

"So many Christians continue to be the target of violence, let us remember them in our prayers," said the pope.