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Pope Francis, who is sitting, hands a Bible to a standing woman with short gray hair and a bla

Pope Francis gives a Bible to a woman he installed as a lector during a Mass marking the Sunday of the Word of God in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican Jan. 22, 2023. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

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The Word of God, which heals and raises people up, is meant for everyone, Pope Francis said.

Jesus "wants to reach those far away, he wants to heal the sick, he wants to save sinners, he wants to gather the lost sheep and lift up those whose hearts are weary and oppressed," the pope said.

"Jesus 'reaches out' to tell us that God's mercy is for everyone," he said in his homily during Mass in St. Peter's Basilica Jan. 22, the church's celebration of Sunday of the Word of God.

During the Mass, the pope also formally installed seven men and women in the ministry of catechist and three others in the ministry of lector. Francis gave each of the lectors a Bible and the catechists a crucifix.

In his homily, the pope said the Lord invites everyone to conversion and invites his disciples to actively "spread the light of the word" to everyone.

Jesus is "always on the move, on his way to others," the pope said. "On no occasion in his public life does he give us the idea that he is a stationary teacher, a professor seated on a chair; on the contrary, we see him as an itinerant, we see him as a pilgrim, traveling through towns and villages, encountering faces and their stories."

Jesus preaches in places where there are "people plunged into darkness: foreigners, pagans, women and men from various regions and cultures," showing that his word "is not only destined for the righteous of Israel, but for all."

"Moreover, if salvation is destined for all, even the most distant and lost, then the proclamation of the Word must become the main priority of the ecclesial community, as it was for Jesus," he said.

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"May it not happen that we profess a God with an expansive heart yet become a church with a closed heart -- this, I dare say, would be a curse," he said. "May it not happen that we preach salvation for all yet make the way to receive it impractical; may it not happen that we recognize we are called to proclaim the kingdom yet neglect the Word, losing ourselves in so many secondary activities or discussions."

"Place your life under the Word of God," he said. "All of us, even the pastors of the church, are under the authority of the Word of God. Not under our own tastes, tendencies and preferences."

The word of God "molds us, converts us and calls us to be united in the one church of Christ," so the faithful must ask themselves, "Where does my life find direction"? "From the many 'words' I hear, from ideologies, or from the word of God that guides and purifies me?"

When people recognize God's presence and make room for his word, "you will change your outlook on life."

After the Mass, the pope prayed the Angelus with visitors in St. Peter's Square. Before the prayer, he said that following Jesus is a journey that requires leaving the status quo behind.

"What must we leave behind? Our vices and our sins, certainly, which are like anchors that hold us at bay and prevent us from setting sail," he said, but also those things that keep one from "living fully, for example, fear, selfish calculations, the guarantees that come from staying safe, just getting by."

He asked people to reflect on "what are the material things, ways of thinking, attitudes I need to leave behind so as to truly say 'yes'" like Mary and to follow Jesus better. "We will always find that we are better."