Vatican
Vatican News
A man wearing a koukoulion, an Orthodox headdress, shakes Pop Francis' hand, as a Brown n

Pope Francis meets Anglican Archbishop Ian Ernest, the archbishop of Canterbury's representative in Rome, and Orthodox Metropolitan Polykarpos of Italy, the Ecumenical Patriarchate's representative in Rome, during an ecumenical evening prayer service marking the end of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity at the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls in Rome Jan. 25, 2023. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

Cindy Wooden

View Author Profile



Catholic News Service

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

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

Rome — January 25, 2023
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

God suffers and grieves when those who profess to believe in him do not love the people he loves and do not work for the justice he desires, Pope Francis said.

"God suffers when we, who call ourselves his faithful ones, put our own ways of seeing things before his, when we follow the judgments of the world rather than those of heaven, when we are content with exterior rituals yet remain indifferent to those for whom he cares the most," the pope said in his homily Jan. 25 at an ecumenical evening prayer service.

Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Anglican and Protestant representatives joined the pope at Rome's Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls for vespers closing the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Members of the Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religions joined the mostly Rome-based religious leaders for the service.

The Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity and the Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches entrusted the preparations of the 2023 week of prayer to a group convened by the Minnesota Council of Churches.

Acknowledging "the injustices perpetrated in the past against native peoples and in our own day against African Americans," Francis said, the group chose as the theme for the week "Do good; seek justice" from Isaiah 1:17.

In the face of "various forms of contempt and racism, before indifference, lack of understanding and sacrilegious violence, the word of God admonishes us: 'Learn to do good, seek justice,'" the pope said. "It is not enough to denounce, we need also to renounce evil, to pass from evil to good."

"In other words," he said, God's "admonishment is meant to change us."

In Isaiah's time -- and even today, the pope said, "it was generally thought that the rich, who made great offerings and looked down upon the poor, were blessed in God's eyes. Yet this was, and is, completely to misunderstand the Lord. It is the poor that Jesus proclaims blessed, and in the parable of the final judgment, he identifies himself with those who hunger and thirst, the stranger, the needy, the sick and those in prison."

Advertisement

Even more, Francis said, God is offended by "sacrilegious violence," the violence of destroying another person, made in God's image and likeness.

"We can imagine with what suffering he must witness wars and acts of violence perpetrated by those who call themselves Christians," the pope said.

With all the knowledge people have of spirituality and theology, he said, "we have no excuses" to believe that God would want faith to be used to harm another.

"Still, there are those who appear to feel encouraged or at least permitted by their faith to support varieties of narrow and violent nationalism, xenophobia and contempt, and even the mistreatment of those who are different," the pope said.

In fidelity to God, he said, "we must be opposed to war, to violence and to injustice wherever they begin to appear."

Francis prayed that St. Paul would "help us to change, to be converted; may he obtain for us something of his own indomitable courage."

Such courage is needed to continue on the path to full Christian unity, he said, and to overcome the temptations to be impatient or to focus only on the needs of one's own church.