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Pope Francis uses a cane and puts his hand to his ear as he stands in front of a group of youn

Pope Francis greets members of a youth orchestra from Carpi, Italy, before his weekly general audience in the Vatican audience hall Feb. 15, 2023. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)



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Christians are not called to "argue, counterattack and defend themselves" when evangelizing but to be meek and humble, Pope Francis said.

At his general audience Feb. 15, the pope continued his series of catechesis on evangelization and apostolic zeal.

The pope said Christians often think "we will become relevant, numerous, prestigious and that the world will listen to and respect us" if they evangelize forcefully. Instead, he said, Christ asks his followers to be "sheep among wolves," protected by God and marked by "meekness, innocence and dedication."

Each Christian's call to evangelize stems from a personal encounter with Christ just as the disciples had, Francis explained.

"To evangelize does not mean going 'blah, blah, blah' and nothing more," the pope said while waving his hand to convey a rambling speech. It requires "a passion that involves all of you: the mind, the heart, the hands, everything. The whole person."

Addressing the disciples' seemingly contradictory obligations to be close to Jesus and go out to share his message, the pope said the two elements of discipleship go together, since "without mission the relationship with (Jesus) does not grow."

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Proclaiming the Gospel to others begins with having encountered Jesus, he said. One cannot share the light of Christ without first experiencing it.

But, the pope continued, "following Christ is not an inward-looking fact: without proclamation, without service, without mission, the relationship with him does not grow."

"That is how you proclaim (the Gospel)," the pope said, "by showing Jesus more than talking about Jesus."

Francis also noted that in preaching the Gospel, "we often invite people to do something" rather than focus on communicating the Gospel's "principal message" of God's closeness to his people. He urged Christians to communicate "the reality of God," as "the close, the tender, the merciful one" through their lives and actions.

And just as Jesus sent his disciples out in pairs or groups, Christians are not meant to be alone in their missions, he said; they should go forth together, relying on support from one another rather than on worldly attention or rewards.