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Pope Francis stands with a cane and looks at a portrait of him that is much bigger than him w

The gift of a portrait of Pope Francis can be seen as the pope concludes an audience with members of the "Pro Petri Sede" Association Feb. 24, 2023, at the Vatican. The group, founded more than 150 years ago, is active in Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg, and collects donations for the pope's initiatives and charitable efforts by the Holy See. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

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The call to make sacrifices for others out of love remains urgent as so many people continue to suffer from war, violence, exclusion and poverty, Pope Francis said.

"Let us put into practice the call to do good to everyone, taking the time to love the least and most defenseless, the abandoned and despised, those who are discriminated against and marginalized," he said during an audience with members of the "Pro Petri Sede" Association Feb. 24 at the Vatican.

The group, founded more than 150 years ago, is active in Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg, and collects donations for the pope's initiatives and charitable

efforts by the Holy See.

"Today the call to give yourselves for love of our brothers and sisters is no less urgent: so many of them suffer from war, violence, exclusion, material and spiritual poverty," he said in his address.

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Lent is also an opportune time for responding to this call because the season "calls us to conversion in order to move from the slavery of selfishness to the freedom to love and serve God and our brothers and sisters," he said.

Francis recalled the generosity and solidarity of the early Christians described in the Acts of the Apostles and how "they were able to put everything in common to support their more fragile brothers and sisters."

"They understood that they were the temporary stewards of their goods: indeed, all that we possess is a gift from God and we must let ourselves be enlightened by him in the stewardship of the goods we receive," the pope said.

The Holy Spirit, he said, "will always impel us to give to those in need, to fight poverty with what he gives us. For the Lord gives abundantly to us so that we in turn can give ourselves."