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Pope Francis stands among a group of children who look elementary-school-aged in St. Peter'

Pope Francis stands with a group of children during his general audience in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican March 22, 2023. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

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To evangelize well, the faithful need to dialogue with God, let the Holy Spirit renew their hearts and lives, and then dialogue with today's world, Pope Francis said.

The Holy Spirit is "the protagonist of evangelization. Without the Holy Spirit we will only be advertising the church," he said during his weekly general audience in St. Peter's Square March 22.

The church, too, always must be "evangelizing herself" or else "it remains a museum piece," he said.

The pope continued his series of talks about "the passion for evangelization: the apostolic zeal of the believer" by reflecting on St. Paul VI's apostolic exhortation "Evangelii Nuntiandi" (On Evangelization in the Modern World) and its emphasis on

witnessing to Christ.

"You cannot evangelize without witness -- the witness of the personal encounter with Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word in which salvation is fulfilled," he said.

"Witness also includes professed faith, that is, convinced and manifest adherence to God the father, son and Holy Spirit, who created and redeemed us out of love," he said.

And, he said, it is a faith "that transforms us, that transforms our relationships, the criteria and the values that determine our choices. Witness, therefore, cannot be separated from consistency between what one believes and what one proclaims."

"A person is credible if there is harmony between what they believe and live, how they believe and live," the pope said. Anything else is hypocrisy.

"Every one of us is required to respond to three fundamental questions, posed in this way by St. Paul VI: 'Do you believe what you are proclaiming? Do you live what you believe? Do you preach what you live?'" the pope said.

"We cannot be satisfied with easy, pre-packaged answers," he said. "We are called upon to accept the risk, albeit destabilized, of the search, trusting fully in the action of the Holy Spirit who works in each one of us, driving us ever further: beyond our boundaries, beyond our barriers, beyond our limits, of any type.

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St. Paul VI, he said, "teaches that the zeal for evangelization springs from holiness which springs from a heart filled with God. Nourished by prayer and, above all, by love for the Eucharist, evangelization in turn increases holiness in the people who carry it out."

"Without holiness, the word of the evangelizer 'will have difficulty in touching the heart of modern man' and 'risks being vain and sterile'" because it is just a string of empty words, he said, quoting St. Paul's exhortation.

Evangelization is addressed not only to others "but also ourselves, believers in Christ and active members of the people of God," Francis said. "We have to convert every day, receive the word of God and change our life each day, this is how you

evangelize the heart."

The Catholic Church, "which is the people of God immersed in the world," is often tempted by many idols, therefore, "she always needs to hear the proclamation of the mighty works of God," to pray and feel the power of the Holy Spirit, which changes people's hearts, he said.

"A church that evangelizes herself in order to evangelize is a church that, guided by the Holy Spirit, is required to walk a demanding path of conversion and renewal," he said.

This includes "the ability to change the ways of understanding and living its evangelizing presence in history, avoiding taking refuge in the protected zones of the logic of 'it has always been done this way' (which) are shelters that make the church fall ill," he said.

"The church must always go forward, it must continually grow," he added. "This way it stays young."

At the end of the audience, the pope underlined the sanctity of all human life. He greeted the faithful from Poland, which celebrates the Day for the Sanctity of Life March 25.

"As a sign of the need to protect human life from conception to its natural end, the Yes to Life Foundation is giving to Zambia the 'Voice of the Unborn' bell, which I blessed this morning," he said.

"May its sound carry the message that every life is sacred and inviolable," he added.