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Pope Francis greets a child and Archbishop Francisco Cerro Chaves of Toeldo, Spain, during an audience with the archdiocese's Mother of Hope of Talavera de la Reina Foundation at the Vatican April 15, 2023. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)



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Everyone has gifts and talents that can be a public witness to God's love and mercy, Pope Francis told a group of people with intellectual disabilities and their teachers.

"It is beautiful that in our smallness we can be witnesses of Jesus, missionaries of mercy, missionaries of his love," the pope said April 15. "Jesus looks at us and is happy at our effort and the love we are able to transmit."

Francis made his comments in a meeting with members of the Mother of Hope of Talavera de la Reina Foundation, a project of the Archdiocese of Toledo, Spain, that provides education and vocational training to children and adults with intellectual disabilities and promotes their inclusion in society.

One of the group's largest projects each year is an annual Way of the Cross ceremony, which, the pope said, teaches those involved "the humility to recognize that we can't go it alone."

"There are many things to prepare; you must listen, learn, experiment" to prepare for the ceremony before later "asking the Lord for the courage to go out in the street, carrying his image for all to contemplate."

Just like the yearly procession through the city streets, Francis said, their lives are outward signs that transmit God's love to others through their actions, songs and prayers, even if they aren't always aware of it.

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Francis praised the artwork created by some members of the foundation in their workshops.

While selling their art is important for supporting the foundation financially, the pope said that "the benefit of the labor is greater for those who receive these small objects" and "see all the love you were able to put into its production."

"How important it is to see in the labor of each person the wonder of learning, the patience of their teachers to show them, the teamwork that is capable of converging each person's different abilities into a final result that belongs to everyone," he said.

The pope said that when they work as a team, the artists are the hands of Jesus -- but not only -- they are also his feet, voice and heart when they share the joy of Christ.

"How?" he asked. "By giving thanks to God for your parents, for your siblings, for your teachers, for your priests, for all the people that love you."