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Pope Francis meets with Jesuits in Hungary at the apostolic nunciature in Budapest April 29, 2

Pope Francis meets with Jesuits in Hungary at the apostolic nunciature in Budapest April 29, 2023. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

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Rome — May 10, 2023
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Punishing and condemning those guilty of clergy sexual abuse is an act of charity, Pope Francis said.

"The abuser is an enemy. Each of us feels this because we empathize with the suffering of the abused," he said during a private meeting with 32 Jesuits April 29 during his three-day trip to Budapest, Hungary. Those guilty of abuse "deserve punishment, but they also deserve pastoral care."

As is customary during his trips, the pope spent time with local Jesuits, answering their questions; the transcript of the encounter was published May 9 by La Civiltà Cattolica, an Italian Jesuit journal.

One of the Jesuits at the meeting asked the pope about the Gospel commandment to love, "but how do we love at the same time people who have experienced abuse and their abusers? God loves everyone," including the abuser.

"I would like to offer the compassion and love that the Gospel asks for everyone, even the enemy. But how is this possible?" the unnamed Jesuit priest asked.

The pope answered, "It is not easy at all," adding that abuse takes many forms, including "sexual abuse, psychological abuse, economic abuse, migrant abuse."

"How do we approach, how do we talk to the abusers for whom we feel revulsion? Yes, they too are children of God. But how can you love them? It's a powerful question," the pope said.

"The abuser is to be condemned, indeed, but as a brother. Condemning him is to be understood as an act of charity," the pope said. This is how love for the enemy can be expressed, but it is still not easy to grasp and live out.

"When you hear what abuse leaves in the hearts of abused people, the impression you get is very powerful," he said. "Even talking to the abuser involves revulsion; it's not easy. But they are God's children too."

While those guilty of abuse "deserve punishment," he said, they also "deserve pastoral care. How do we provide that? No, it is not easy."

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Another confrere asked the pope about the Second Vatican Council and how it discussed the relationship between the church and the modern world. "How can we reconcile the church" and an era that is already postmodern and "how do we find God's voice while loving our time?" he asked.

Francis said that "the council is still being applied," and it will probably take many more decades for its teachings "to be assimilated."

The problem, he said, is "the resistance [to its decrees] is terrible. There is an unbelievable [support for] restorationism, what I call '*indietrismo*'" or the desire to go back in time.

"The flow of history and grace goes from the roots upward like the sap of a tree that bears fruit. But without this flow you remain a mummy. Going backward does not preserve life, ever," he said.

"The danger today is '*indietrismo*,' the reaction against the modern. It is a nostalgic disease," he said.

"This is why I decided that now the permission to celebrate according to the Roman Missal of 1962 is mandatory for all newly consecrated priests," he said, referring to rules he put in place limiting the celebration of the pre-Vatican II Mass. Diocesan bishops must have Vatican authorization to allow the celebration of the pre-Vatican II Mass in a parish church, to establish a new "personal parish" for devotees of the old Mass or to allow its celebration by a priest ordained after July 2021. The pope had said at the time that his decision was meant "to promote the concord and unity of the church."

During his meeting with the Jesuits in late April, Francis said he decided on making the restrictions "after all the necessary consultations" and "because I saw that the good pastoral measures put in place by John Paul II and Benedict XVI were being used in an ideological way, to go backward."

"It was necessary to stop this 'indietrismo,' which was not in the pastoral vision of my predecessors," he said.